

**EMPLOYEES, MANAGERS AND THE TRADE UNION:
CHANGES AND CONTINUITIES IN THE EMPLOYMENT
RELATIONSHIP 1983-1998.**

A study in the West Midlands Lock Industry

ANNE-MARIE GREENE BA Hons (Oxon), MA (Warwick)

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I dedicate this thesis to my parents, Steve and Hilary, for all their love and support.

Abstract

This thesis is based around two studies in the West Midlands lock industry. It was carried out within a broad ethnographic paradigm and focuses on the voices of those working on the shopfloor as a means of tapping into change and continuity in perceptions of the employment relationship. A longitudinal study over the period 1983-1998 within one firm, revealed interesting themes about what happens to employee attitudes when a traditional paternalistic approach to management is gradually dismantled. A comparison between this firm and another lock company indicated the ways in which issues of union leadership, the bargaining relationship and perceptions of commitment and trust, could be dramatically affected by significant change within the managerial structures and strategies of an organisation¹. The thesis demonstrates how the employment relationship is most usefully seen as a 'drama of negotiation', where union leaders, employees and managers interact within a framework of expected roles and behaviours, that is clearly grounded in the particular historical and sociological contexts of the two firms.

¹ Personal communication with Mike Terry, February, 1999.

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Chapter One: Introduction

The background to the research

This thesis is a development of a larger research project that has a long history, beginning in the early 1980s. Its starting point was a project researching changes in Black Country industrial relations involving several extensive case studies at traditional manufacturing firms, within industries with strong craft traditions. The three industries involved, crystal glass in Stourbridge, woven carpets in Kidderminster, and locks in Willenhall, are all traditional to the area and are, or were, heavily concentrated in local occupational communities. The early research had a particular interest in the traditional characteristics of paternalism existing in these industries and with the developments undermining this paternalism (Ackers and Black, 1991). Other debates guiding the research included the notion of Labourism and the ideological and politicised nature of the working class. Also, contributing to debates about the labour process, the nature of control on the shopfloor was explored with specific interest in the impact of de-skilling (Black and Neathey, 1989). Some of these issues continued to emerge in later projects but looking at the long term development of this research, there has gradually been more of a focus on industrial relations issues, and the nature of the employment relationship. In the late 1980s, the main area of inquiry was how companies had altered their approach to managing organised labour in response to the changed political and economic environment of Thatcherism (Ackers, 1988; Ackers and Black, 1992). A later area of interest has been the attitudes of members to their industrial union, and the nature of workplace unionism, contributing to debates about the nature of British unionism and new union strategies (Greene, 1995; Black et al, 1997). With such a history, there are certain questions, ideas and debates already embedded in the research project that have

been developed and extended. Most notably, this has been the first attempt of one of these research studies to take a truly longitudinal approach, directly drawing on the complete series of studies over the whole period.

This Research

This particular thesis involves firstly, an investigation of the industrial relations climate in a lock-manufacturing factory from the early 1980s to the late 1990s. It draws primarily upon a large quantity of qualitative data amounting to around one hundred and fifty in-depth interviews from four time periods at the same firm. This provides more than just a selection of snapshots, having had the opportunity to talk to workers who were part of the studies in the early 1980s and who are still employed at the research firm. Secondly, a comparison is made with another lock company. The specific subject interest of these studies is the nature of the employment relationship involving workers, the trade union and managers. The work is set in terms of a triangulation between these three parties whereby the three 'corners' are present throughout the research, with the focus shifting, for example from worker-management, to worker-union, to union-management. It is about change and continuity in these relationships over a period of significant change in the wider economic, political, legislative and ideological environment in Britain. While there is a focus on the institutional relationships between union and management, there is also investigation (in greater detail) of aspects of the individual and social group. The research emphasises the local context, focusing for example on the dominance of the industry in the local area, and on a community reliant on the industry. The findings are therefore situated firmly within particular contexts, investigating how the specific organisational context and environment have evolved

together, facilitating understanding of the patterns of relationships inherent in the nature of those contexts.

The thesis aims to chart the changing character of the context in which these relationships occur and aims to investigate the ways in which these relationships have evolved with, responded to and mediated, the wider environmental context. This is essentially a view from the shopfloor offering an interpretation of questions through in-depth analysis of the views, opinions, attitudes, vocabulary and rhetoric of a group of workers. This matches another 'tradition' of the wider series of research projects which placed an emphasis on *"qualitative reconstruction of the rich tapestry of workplace life"* (Ackers, 1988: 41). There has always been a priority given to allowing the voices of the workers, managers and union representatives to guide the analytical process and to be heard within the text. At different points over the period, the studies have focused on the views of particular groups of people in the organisations. In this thesis, it is primarily the shopfloor workers' voices who will be heard and through whose eyes the employment relationship will be viewed.

Apart from the rich empirical background, this research can draw upon and contribute to a large body of literature concerned with debates surrounding the nature of changes in British industrial relations and the labour process since 1979. It fits into the current popularity of research looking at change or mooted changes that have taken place in the context of organisational restructuring, recession and legislation which have offered challenges and opportunities to workers, managers and trade unions (See Hartley, 1992). It shares the theoretical focus (but not the methods) of macro studies such as the Workplace Industrial Relations Survey (Cully et al, 1998; Millward et al, 1992; Millward and Stevens, 1986) which aimed to mould an assessment of the nature of

employment relations within a wider environment. It also shares some of the concerns to uncover a rich qualitative picture of the dynamics of a particular workplace found in plant sociologies such as those of Beynon (1973), Darlington (1994) or Burawoy (1979). Moreover, this thesis goes further than this, firstly, by providing the longitudinal and comparative perspective that is often missing from isolated industrial relations case studies, and secondly by placing an emphasis on local context and community influences, often neglected in the surveys. This is discussed in detail and placed in the context of this research in Chapter Two.

This research draws upon key debates, concepts, theories, and empirical work from a variety of formal disciplines, reflecting the diversity of disciplines that have an input into industrial relations studies which are discussed in the following chapter. Some key concepts have been borrowed from psychology including *commitment*, '*dual commitment*'; *identities* and *attitudes*. Other debates that have been drawn upon have come from industrial sociology, most importantly *labour process theory*. Management studies and organisation studies also have a part to play, particularly concerning *management practices*, *new industrial relations techniques* and *organisational commitment*. In addition, labour studies and trade union research provide debates and concepts relevant to *union membership*, *the nature of unionism*, and *new union strategies*. Finally, sociology and discourse analysis studies provide key debates surrounding the use of language, suggesting ways in which people's views and vocabularies can be interpreted and evaluated. These diverse sources of theoretical debates and concepts however, will be used and evaluated only insofar as they are relevant to the defining theme of the industrial relations climate and the changing nature of the employment relationship. Hartley (1992) identifies two definitions of industrial

relations that prove useful as a starting point for connecting the various theoretical strands of my research. Hyman's definition of industrial relations as "*the processes of control over work relations*" (1975: 31), is useful as it allows for an approach that not only looks at the institutional relationships (management and trade union), but also at aspects of the group and individual. In addition, one of the recurrent threads throughout this thesis is an investigation of the nature of the terms of engagement between workers, union and management. Walker's definition of industrial relations as "*essentially concerned with the accommodation between the various interests that are involved in the process of getting work done*" (1979: 11), is also useful because it recognises the mixture of conflict and co-operation that exists in the employment relationship. This view of the employment relationship appears to have general agreement in most industrial relations texts; focusing in on the contradictory nature of the 'structured antagonism' which managers and workers are locked into (For a summary, see Edwards 1995: 1-15).

Outline of Methodology

This research used a qualitative case study methodology within a broad ethnographic paradigm, which is discussed in detail in Chapter Three. The core research is the revisit of earlier studies at one lock company, which will be referred to as LockCo. A variety of qualitative techniques were employed, based around extended, semi-structured interviews with workers and union representatives, (many of whom had been interviewed as part of the earlier studies), and an extensive period of observation, attendance and informal presence at the company over a three year period. In order to provide some cross comparison within the lock industry, a new study was carried out at a neighbouring lock company which will be referred to as KeyCo. This involved interviews with workers and union representatives within the same remit as the longitudinal study and also offered

opportunities to talk to a group of managers. Extensive use has been made of past research material, with new coding and analysis of the collection of interviews over the whole time period.

Outline of Thesis

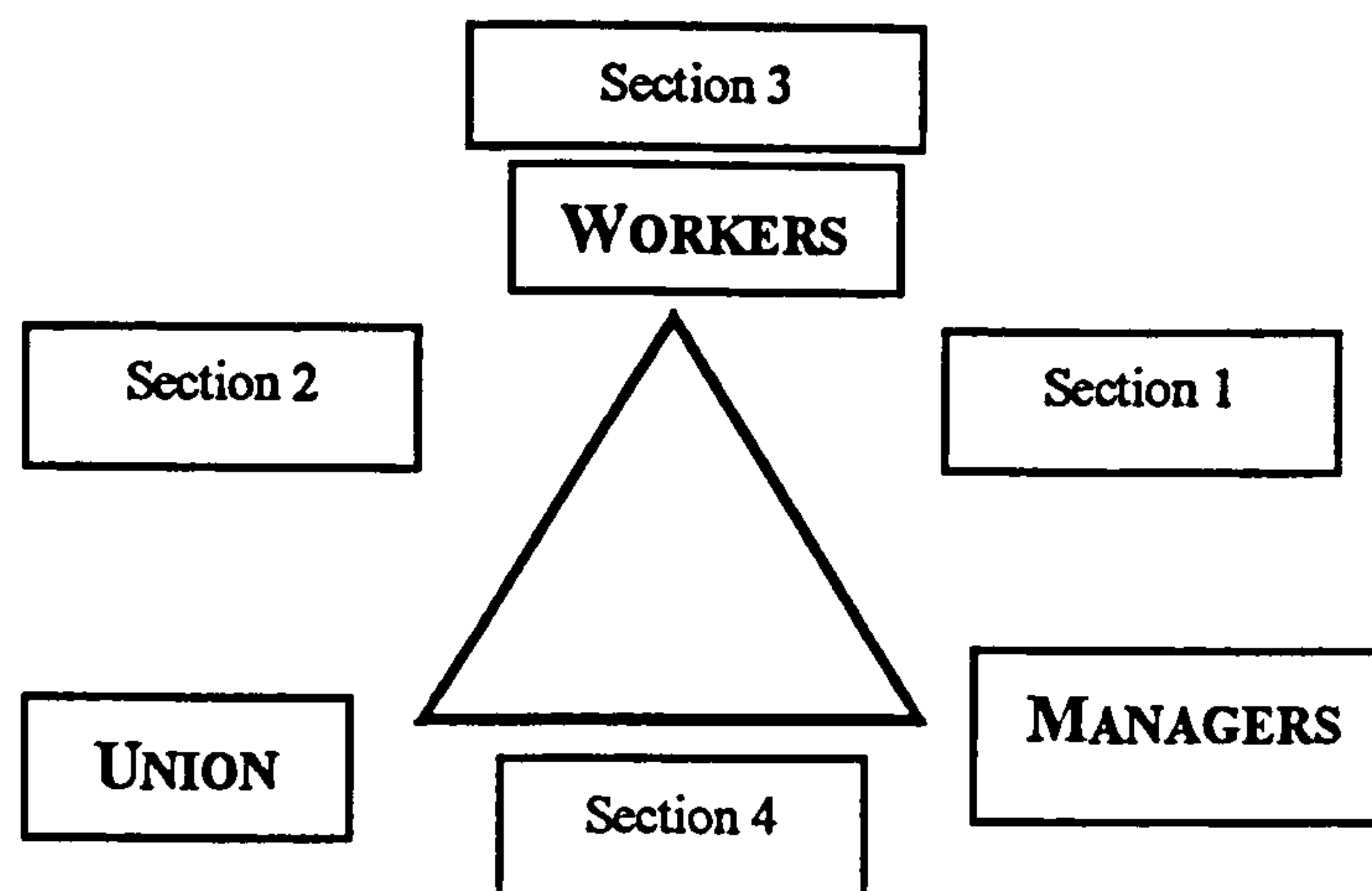
Chapter Two goes on to discuss the developments of the main concepts and debates that underpin the research questions. It begins at micro level, by outlining the local context of the research, providing information about the nature of the lock industry, the historical and sociological traditions of LockCo and KeyCo, the nature of the lock union and the industrial relations climate. It then moves to the macro-level, to discuss the nature of the wider context and developments in the economic, political, legislative and ideological climate in Britain over the period, reflecting how Thatcherism is widely recognised as a 'turning point' for industrial relations in Britain. Finally, it provides an outline of the overarching theoretical debates which informed the research questions of this thesis. This structure may appear unusual and is the reversal of the normal pattern. However, moving from the particular and working out to the general literature has a coherence within this thesis. It was important to focus in from the beginning on the particular cases; firstly because it highlights that the thesis comes out of a long-standing project. Secondly, while some wider implications can be drawn, the primary emphasis of the thesis was to understand the workplace dynamics, rather than try and generalise for all manufacturing industry; so again the 'micro-focus' was important.

Chapter Three presents the use of a qualitative methodology within a broad ethnographic paradigm. It details the way in which the fieldwork was carried out and how use was made of the data from previous studies to gain the longitudinal perspective. It offers a

reflexive account of the ethical issues involved in the research and the ways in which the reader can see the account as authentic.

Chapter Four is essentially what would be the findings chapter in a more quantitative study. Here it presents an account of the perceptions, views and attitudes of the groups of workers over the period. The findings have been separated into four sections based around the theme of 'them and us'. This makes use of 'folk terms' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983) utilising a phrase commonly employed by the workers interviewed as a view of the employment relationship, and which forms part of their descriptive and analytical vocabulary. This connects to the ethnographic need to cast descriptions in terms of the constructions and interpretations that those people involved have subjected their experience (Geertz, 1973: 15). Thus, it provided a useful, interesting and relevant tool for my own presentation of workplace relations over the period. Each section involves a discussion of the extent to which attitudes have remained constant or have changed over the time period, and how views at LockCo compare with those at KeyCo. How the sections fit into the framework of the employment relationship is presented in diagram 1. Section One looks at 'Them'; outlining views of management, the legitimacy of the management role, and the nature of commitment to the company. Section Two involves a discussion of 'Us the Union', and outlines views of the workplace union, union effectiveness, the salience of collectivism, and the nature of commitment to the union. Section Three looks at 'Us the Workers', recognising the fact that workers have other identities with different social groups on the shopfloor. It also outlines attitudes towards their work, and ideas of worker control on the shopfloor. Finally, Section Four discusses 'Them and Us', looking at the possibilities of engagement between the three parties within the employment relationship based on the findings.

Diagram 1: Chapter Four: How the findings fit into the research framework



The views from the shopfloor are presented primarily using the interviews with the workers. This stands as the core data, which is surrounded by, complemented and contrasted with, evidence from other sources such as informal chats, observation, documentary evidence, and events and incidents that occurred.

Chapter Five discusses the implications of this research. The chapter is split into four sections. The first presents the significant implications for methodology, focusing on the need for qualitative workplace studies and the utility of the concept of ‘dual commitment’ as a framework. The implications for the workforce are then presented, followed by those significant implications for management. Lastly, a more detailed discussion of the implications for the union is presented, focusing on a conception of the “drama of negotiation” which characterises the employment relationship.

Chapter Two. Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter outlines the main concepts and debates that underpin the research questions which are presented at the end of the chapter. It begins at micro level, by outlining the local context of the research. This provides specific background information about the two companies; looking at the historical and sociological traditions of LockCo and KeyCo, the nature of work organisation in the two factories, and the impact of the external economic and product context. More general details are also given about the lock industry and how it has fared over the period since 1979. The discussion then turns to the lock union and the industrial relations climate in both of the companies, building up a picture of the history of the union's involvement and how this has changed institutionally over the period. It then moves to the macro-level, to discuss the nature of the wider context and developments in the economic, political, legislative and ideological climate in Britain over the period, reflecting on the debates about anticipated and prospective effects of the wider context on workplace employment relations. This highlights certain key areas that might be anticipated to have had an impact on the nature of the employment relationship within the lock companies which form part of the discussion for the analysis of the findings of the thesis. Finally, the discussion moves to present the debates which are key, to an understanding of the nature of the employment relationship at workplace level, providing a conceptual starting point for the research questions and an appropriate methodology.

Overall, a wide-ranging analysis is made of a number of diverse literatures. On one hand, it sets a framework in which antecedents and interest are identified in a range of

research topics. This breadth of discussion is necessary to illustrate the diverse sources that the thesis draws inspiration from and the research that provides a background for the specific areas of research inquiry. However, this discussion needs to be focused and pulled together so that a number of clear areas of inquiry are identified providing not only a conceptual starting point for the thesis, but also an appropriate methodology. As the chapter proceeds, there are summary sections that highlight the key areas of enquiry to emerge from each section, which accumulates, such that a more refined list is identified in the concluding section.

The Local Context

This outline of the local context is important as the attitudes, views and opinions of workers described in Chapter Four must be set against the sociological and historical traditions of the industry, the specific product and labour market pressures, and resultant management strategies motivating change or non-change in industrial relations.

LockCo

The core case study is based around a highly unionised manufacturing firm within the lock industry situated in Britain's heartland of the West Midlands. It employs around seven hundred and fifty people, having faced significant reductions in the workforce over the period, with the workforce at the time of the 1983 study standing at around sixteen hundred. The company has long historical traditions, being founded in the mid nineteenth century and still bearing the name of the founding family. It officially severed the family links and became a public limited company in the 1936, however family members held senior positions on the board of directors. Two brothers stood as Chairman and Joint Managing Director until the 1960s, and a son-in law of the original

family was Managing Director until 1980. In 1965, the company was merged with another large West Midlands based Lock and Safe firm. However, even after merger, the company retained its own identity, with the original family name and product mark. In 1984, the Lock and Safe company was itself taken over by a British Electronics multi-national until 1992 when it de-merged. The group structure was left unchanged until 1997 when another take-over by a multi-national brought the two largest Company groups of the industry under one banner.

LockCo is centred on the original industrial LockTown which has been the centre of the industry for more than four centuries (Ackers, 1988). Ninety percent of firms and seventy percent of the industry's employment continues to be concentrated in this small area of the West Midlands. The company is the market leader in the production of locks (DTI, 1996). As the largest employer in the industry, this firm has dominated local employment since its beginnings and is based on a tightly knit, localised work force. Even today, labour turnover is very low, and a high proportion of employees have more than ten years service, demonstrated in the fact that I was able to interview people who had been involved in the research from its beginnings in the early 1980s. Large complex family networks still exist on the shopfloor, with children following their parents into the industry and the company. The majority of those interviewed in 1996 had family members or relatives working in the lock industry. Little has changed over the period; only two people did not have relatives in the firm, and many had immediate family members working with them, including three workers who had met their spouses in the firm. As one recent retiree stated in 1996, "I'm the third or fourth generation coming into the industry from my mother's side. In fact, the day I left I think I said goodbye to something like a hundred and forty seven years of continuous service". Many employees still live in LockTown, and many within walking distance of the factories, reinforcing the sense of occupational

community. Some have moved away, indeed while over half of those interviewed in 1983 lived in LockTown, this had reduced to a quarter of the group by 1996. However the furthest that people lived away from the factory was six miles.

In many respects, the company fits into an anatomy of paternalism (Ackers, 1998; Ackers and Black, 1991; Fox, 1985), with *“characteristic features of hereditary family ownership, personal relations between employer and workers, a sense of religious mission and a commitment to social welfare and public service. The ideal-type paternalist workforce matches these with family employment through large kinship networks, which are embedded in a surrounding occupational community, isolated from major metropolitan industrial centres”* (Ackers, 1998: 3). Some of these features continue to characterise LockCo. Under family ownership, the company practised a brand of ‘paternalistic capitalism’ (Ackers and Black, 1991) which has left a mark on the culture of the modern firms. Traditionally, company directors were well known in the town and factories and frequently enjoyed first name personal relations with workers, a fact remembered nostalgically by many long service employees (Greene, 1995; Ackers, 1988). For decades they have been at the heart of the local community, including involvement with a wide variety of social and welfare activities such as sports teams, charity sponsorship, company days out and social clubs. Walking around the now defunct clubhouse of the LockCo Sports and Social club on the factory grounds, the walls are strewn with photographs attesting to the company’s involvement; the victorious LockCo football team of 1953, or the managing director presenting the winning shield to the champions of the inter-firm bowls tournament in 1972. This paternalistic style was supported structurally by a general tradition of low labour turnover; a high proportion of long service employees; and large, complex family networks. Management helped to

sustain this by working with the union to avoid forced redundancies through methods of short time working, voluntary redundancies, transfer of employees around the factory and by the use of the pool of labour in the form of relations and family members through a form of 'extended internal labour market' (Manwaring, 1984). This internal recruitment process caused the company to be investigated by the Commission for Racial Inquiry in the mid 1970s, when it was found that these recruitment practices perpetuated an unrepresentative all-white workforce. All jobs are now advertised in Job Centres, although they are still also advertised internally on notice boards, and the importance of knowledge of lock manufacturing makes this change more formal than in reality. However, by 1996 more people had joined the company through alternative avenues than this informal family route than in earlier studies, suggesting the decline of this family tradition, which is brought out more clearly in Chapter Four.

Work Organisation

With regard to the nature of work organisation and managerial responses to economic and market pressures, the company has demonstrated a large degree of continuity in work organisation and industrial relations culture. Indeed it was seen as resembling an *“ocean-liner rich.. in cultural constraints and [with] inertias embedded at every level of the organisation “* (Ackers and Black, 1992: 4), which meant that employers and managers usually preferred to manage change by developing tried and trusted strategies and relationships. The basic production process had not changed qualitatively from that which existed in the late nineteenth century. The firm was organised on large scale factory lines of a labour and materials intensive nature. High levels of functional flexibility and mobility had already been achieved by the 1980s. The gender ratio is roughly equal (See Table 2). In response to Equal Pay and Sex Discrimination

legislation, the industry wages system was rationalised in 1974 into a more complex grading system, formally ending the division between male and female jobs. However, semi-skilled women workers in practice were only graded from G to D, while skilled men were graded from C to A. The skill divisions thus came to closely mirror gender divisions on the shop floor, and had come to increasingly follow the distinction between semi/ unskilled female direct piece-workers (assemblers and machinists) and male indirect day workers. Today, conditions are certainly hard at the factory. Walking around, the noise of machinery is deafening and ear plugs are necessary at all times. Areas like the plating shop were particularly unpleasant to work in, where dangerous chemicals were present and where some specialist products are still hand plated. The most prominent image of assembly work is its fast pace. The effects of this are demonstrated by watching the women at their benches, as they rock their torsos as they work, getting into the rhythm necessary to keep the piece rate up to speed. Most of the machining is still done on hand presses and around the shopfloor and there are still many people hand filing locks and keys. The women wear tapes or plasters on their fingers to protect their hands from splinters of metal and relentless skin abrasion.

Relatively little change has been experienced and there has been sparse evidence of any managerial initiatives or strategies. The merger in 1965 had little effect on existing personnel and structures, and indeed the Group owners seemed happy to leave the company alone; for example not mentioning it once in one copy of the Group Newspaper (Ackers, 1988: 81). Similarly, the electronics multi-national that took the firm over in 1984 did not seem inclined to take any strategic control and the company was left pretty much alone to be governed by the incumbent managers. The wider, general trend of downturn in product sales seemed to be mediated by the continuing maintenance of a

modest turnover (DTI, 1996), and no initiatives or new marketing policies which had any lasting impact, were introduced. In one of the earlier studies, there was some speculation that as part of the new owner's innovative marketing strategy, LockCo's own distinctive brand name would disappear (Ackers, 1988). This has never occurred. Similarly, while in 1988, it had been predicted that with the take-over, electronic locks, or 'locktronics' might change the traditional, labour intensive character of the industry, again this development has yet to materialise. While some new products were introduced, they do not appear to have been successful, indeed the LockCo convenor in 1996 remarked that the innovations "haven't been total failures but have only gone into niche markets and not mass produced. We're a global market and we do very well in the middle east and the African belt [because as] in Britain we like the good old fashioned key"². This 'laissez faire' policy has changed significantly since the recent take-over in February, with LockCo now facing plans for rationalisation of the workforce and dramatic restructuring of work organisation such as has been put in place at other lock companies under its ownership, including KeyCo, which is discussed in the next section.

KeyCo

KeyCo shares much of the historical and sociological background of LockCo. It is similarly based within the industrial lock town, only a ten minute walk away, on two main sites. It is smaller, employing around four hundred and fifty people. As at LockCo, it was founded in the mid nineteenth century and retains its well known family name.

² Interview with the LockCo convenor as part of my MA research (Greene, 1995).

While it became a public limited company in the 1930s, family involvement continued until 1967 when the firm was taken over by an American conglomerate. KeyCo has been taken over by five different firms over the 1980s, however until 1989, few major changes in work organisation, personnel or product lines had occurred. As at LockCo, the company was acquired as part of a package, with the new owners taking a very similar 'laissez-faire' approach. Work organisation had been along similar Taylorist lines to LockCo for decades. However, the employer response at each of the companies has differed significantly from the late 1980s. Following a take-over by a UK based Security multi-national in 1988, KeyCo has seen the introduction of new technology and cellular work organisation, the abolition of piecework and its replacement by cash-less measured day work and a productivity-based bonus scheme. In addition, it has experienced massive rationalisation in terms of labour, which saw the workforce cut from 1500 in 1984 to only 480 by 1986 (a 63% fall). While there is still a broad gender division of labour on the shopfloor, there is greater equality within the grading system now, and a much larger number of women in team leader positions than there were female charge hands in the past. The company has also attempted to introduce company communication devices through team briefings, and direct communication between managers and employees on the shop floor. There is evidence in the discourse of managers at KeyCo, of a desire to get the company working as a team, and to break down the traditional 'them and us' attitudes. The union however, has been viewed as a useful communication and negotiation institution within this change process-which is discussed in more detail in Chapter Four, Section Two. In the context of the recent take-over of LockCo by the same multi-national in February 1997, KeyCo has acted as a model for management policy, and re-structuring along similar lines has been proposed at LockCo. Negotiations for a similar process of abolition of piecework, introduction of cellular manufacturing,

and rationalisation of the workforce at LockCo were underway as this thesis was being written up.

The Lock Industry

Some of the continuity in terms of work organisation at the two plants until the late 1980s, can be explained by the comparatively limited impact of the first of the major recessions over the period. From 1980 to 1984, the industry was hit initially by the high pound and fall in domestic demand due to the downturn in house-building and the whole industry suffered cutbacks in output with employment falling by 26% (Stenner, 1989). Reflecting this, in the Lock Union's Annual Report of 1981, the President stated that:-
"Members will appreciate that the lock manufacturing industry is currently in recession and that the immediate medium term future is not optimistic, these two years have seen a further decline in the fortunes of our members and our industry with more factory closures, more redundancies and short time working" (T. G. Sadler quoted in Stenner, 1989: 121).

However, this decline was on a less dramatic scale than much of manufacturing industry due to the enduring domestic market (albeit smaller) and maintenance of levels of exports. Contrary to the cautious pessimism of the union President, overall, the market remained relatively stable and buoyant, and recovery in employment was experienced from 1984 (Stenner, 1989; Ackers, 1988). The situation in the period of the second recession (late 1980s-early 1990s) is quite different. Employment fell more severely in the period 1989-1992. This is demonstrated in the massive reduction in employment in the industry from 10750 in 1979 (Ackers, 1988) to around 4000 in 1996 (DTI, 1996). The depressed state of the building industry in residential, commercial and public sectors had a severe effect on market demand and the group of which both companies are part of

has suffered a £10 million fall in world-wide sales 1989-1995 (DTI, 1996). More significantly, the industry faces tough competition from cheaper foreign imports (particularly from South East Asia) and has changed from being a net exporter to a net importer 1980-1995 (DTI, 1996). To meet this threat, the multi-national group that now owns both LockCo and KeyCo bought a lock factory in China in 1996. While export markets have varied between the firms, (KeyCo has had more European and US markets, while LockCo has concentrated on the former Commonwealth countries, the Middle East and Africa), their product lines are very similar. The logic of merging the companies is thus obvious and integration of the firms should not pose too many problems in the area of products and markets.

The Lock Union and Industrial Relations Tradition

The industrial LockUnion (National Union of Lock and Metal Workers) is similarly locally based and also has a long history, having been founded in 1889. It has remained a very small union and at its peak in 1979, had only 6843 members (Stenner, 1989). The membership now stands at about 3500 representing around 80% of the total workforce of the lock industry. While membership has been affected by the rationalisation associated with the recession, it is, as the President stated 'a very money affluent union' and has maintained a profit position throughout the period, substantially increasing accumulated net surplus 1974-1995 (NULMW, Annual Reports 1980-97). The union, by necessity, has a particular regional character, with 95% of the membership located within a five mile radius of the headquarters in the industrial town. From 1974 to 1990 when it was abolished by legislation, the union had an industry-wide closed shop agreement that was formally supported by the employers. However, even in the absence of the formal arrangement, de facto closed shops exist at both LockCo and KeyCo where union density

is near 100%. Re-signing campaigns (in line with legislation) which occurred in January 1998 upheld this high density level at both firms. There has traditionally been a multi-union presence at the lock companies, and indeed until the closed shop for blue collar workers was introduced, the tool room was represented by the Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU). However, (while of not specific interest in this thesis), the white collar workers, or staff, have not traditionally been recruited by the LockUnion and were represented by TASS (now part of Manufacturing, Science and Finance-MSF). In 1998, there were only nine staff members who continued to be part of MSF. The LockUnion has been able to recruit 80% of staff at LockCo, and around 40% of staff at KeyCo. Thus the LockUnion has increased its dominance at the companies over the period.

In terms of members' experience of the LockUnion, it has always had a generous benefits package comparable to a much larger union, (see for instance Unison, 1996) and the national leadership has deliberately aimed to increase the provision of 'costless benefits' since 1987 (See later discussion in Chapter Four: Section Two). The union is very effective in terms of common law, unfair dismissal and industrial accident claims, which is seen as a particular strength by those members interviewed at both firms (Black et al, 1997). Matching the 'family' atmosphere of the companies, there is a large degree of social familiarity between members and full time officials, perhaps fostered by the very low ratio of full time officers to members of only 1:1250 compared to 1:30000 at a large union (Unison, 1996). There is also a close integration of workplace structure and national structure through the executive committee (EC). The compact nature of the industry means that most employees will know and can contact an EC member at their workplace. Thus it does not appear to be characterised by the separation between the

workplace organisation and the 'bureaucracy', commonly found in case studies of British unions (Hyman, 1975; Kelly and Heery, 1994).

The national union has a traditional place within the local community, which has been deliberately developed since 1979 where, as the General Secretary relates, the union can act as a substitute for the large employers whose role in the local community and paternalistic involvement has declined over the period. The union gets involved in a wide variety of social activities including sports, charity sponsorship and family days out, and also participates in a number of non-social activities. This reflects a tradition of involvement, similar to that of the lock companies; a festival for local children in 1914, a day out for the unemployed of the community and their families in 1923, while the first union outing to Rhyl in 1927 initiated what continues as an annual event up to the present day. The union has also been involved in economic activities, such as setting up a fund to aid the Willenhall Town Development Scheme in 1917; and in 1921, the creation of its own meat business, providing cheap meat to local residents with the aim of forcing local butchers to reduce their exorbitant prices (Stenner, 1989: 59, 68, 73). The most recent example was in March 1996, when the union convened a symposium of local MPs, delegates from companies, and union representatives, in order to discuss courses of action to deal with the threat of foreign imports to the industry. The union continues to sponsor local individuals for a variety of charitable causes, and in addition, links these more immediate campaigns in the local community with more distant forms of community action. This is demonstrated in the support for wider causes such as the local branch of Amnesty International, recently joining a letter-writing campaign in support of Indonesian trade unionists. The union also acts as an alternative Citizens Advice Bureau. Examples include a member complaining about a personal problem with

British Gas; another member pursued by a company for non-payment, both of whom received legal representation in court from the union solicitors. In some cases, they deal with queries from spouses and relatives who are not union members. Examples of other unions with these characteristics are few in the UK, but similarities can be seen with unions such as the Footwear Union, (see Goodman, 1977).

The industrial relations atmosphere at the companies has been traditionally characterised by co-operative relations between union and management within a tradition of pluralism (centred on the industrial union). This type of industrial relationship characterised many firms in Britain in the mid to late nineteenth century. This is described by Fox (1985; 126) as 'weak' paternalism, where employers recognised employees' rights to organised representation which is somewhat incompatible with a 'strong' paternalistic notion of 'father knows best'. In the 1930s, the family owners actively encouraged union membership among their workers (Ackers, 1988; Stenner, 1983) and this has continued through to the present day. Employers at both firms continue to provide facilities for union business and time off for convenors and stewards. This support had increased from the 1970s, for example in 1974, the convenor at LockCo spent about a third of his time on union business³, whereas in 1996, the convenor worked full time on union business. In addition, in both firms, employers actively encouraged membership by inviting union representatives to company induction days, confirming that the industrial union is the

³ Interview with ex-convenor of LockCo, January 1996.

only union recognised for collective bargaining; and supporting methods of union subscription through check-off.

The union has always been 'moderate' in its stance towards the employers and has rarely had recourse to strike action. Indeed, this moderation has a very long history. One of the codes of practice of the Lock, Key, Bolt and General Hardware Burial and Trade Protection Society, (the immediate antecedent of the union) was that "the society did not see the strike as a weapon of first resort and would not strike until the employers had been asked to put any question in dispute to a board of arbitrators chosen by the employers and the society" (Stenner, 1989: 5). The union has a history of close links with the employers which has a long tradition among the Midlands small metal trades around the time that the union was formed. This bears considerable similarities to the attitudes of other older craft unions which have always had a 'partnership' attitude to employers (Ackers, 1994; Clegg, Fox and Thompson, 1964). One can see how this largely collaborative approach can lead to gains for the membership. The union has had a powerful influence within the industry, indeed this industry was the first in the private manufacturing sector to achieve the thirty seven and a half hour week in 1973 (Stenner, 1989). In addition, throughout its history, the union has successfully looked for alternative tactics to strike action. The most prominent example since 1979 has been the negotiation of the suspension of the cost of living index in 1981 (Stenner, 1989). The agreement had worked well until inflation increased dramatically in 1980, but while the union had to be sympathetic to the employers' point of view, the demise of the agreement was only agreed with a 10% wage increase across the board. In essence, compromise was seen as a better strategy. A degree of moderation was seen as essential

to cultivate a stable institutional relationship with employers through good and bad economic times.

Historically, the union organisation at each company has developed similarly. The union occupied a central position in both firms, recognised for traditional collective bargaining of wages and terms and conditions. Both workplace organisations appeared to rest on highly informal relations with management. Other than wage bargaining and a 'bare bones' four stage agreement for disciplinary procedures, little was committed to paper and most negotiation appeared to be carried out through informal chats and a high trust, personal relationship between the convenors and personnel managers. The ex-convenor commented on the strength of the union at KeyCo, with a full time convenor's position, shop stewards for each department (amounting to an organisation of fourteen), weekly shop stewards' meetings, and departmental works council arrangements where employee representatives would meet with management. He also described his successful personal working relationship with the Personnel Director leading to advances such as the introduction of a new piecework system, the introduction of a system to reduce the amount of redundancies and a company wide wage negotiation to replace the existing departmental wage negotiations. This matches the historical background of the union at LockCo, which saw the evolution of the full time convenor's role in the 1970s and the existence of a similarly strong shop steward network. The union occupied a central position in both companies, recognised by management for traditional collective bargaining of wages and terms and conditions. Today, the industrial relations culture at both firms continues to be informal in character and there is still little formal documentation, with much of the negotiation still resting on the personal working relationships between convenors and personnel managers.

The present situation of the union organisation at each workplace indicates some differences. In terms of representation, at KeyCo, the shop steward network has depleted significantly. There are now only five shop stewards servicing the four hundred strong workforce. At LockCo, there is still a shop steward organisation of sixteen, broadly representing one steward for each department or work group area. Taking into account the significant reduction of the workforce at KeyCo, the union at LockCo still has three times as many representatives per employee than at KeyCo. While the Convenor continues to hold a full time position at LockCo, the convenor at KeyCo now works full time on the shop floor, although management agree to the taking of time off for union duties as and when is necessary. At neither firm, does an official apparatus exist for shop stewards and management to meet.

Relations between the national union and employers have deteriorated over the period since 1983, demonstrated in the refusal of LockCo to continue paying for a full time convenor in 1996 (a decision which has been revoked since the take-over in February 1997). Officials, convenors and shop stewards have also commented on the decline in the quality of the personal working relationships that had been characteristic of the older family owned organisations, seen in the fact that the open and informal discussions that had traditionally occurred, were giving way to more formal meetings with the new owners. One example of this has been the failure of industrial wage negotiations since 1991. It must be noted, however, that despite this, the dominant employers in the industry have stood by the union for decades despite governmental attacks against such traditional employer supports such as the closed shop and check-off. This suggests that there are still advantages for the employers in supporting the union. One of the areas I have been interested in, has been the relative degree of this employer support for the

union over the period, linked to a discussion of the impact of the dismantling of a traditional paternalistic management style, which forms part of the analysis of findings in Chapter Five.

The personal nature of union leadership resources may also be a factor, where incumbents to positions of influence can gain advantages and advantages from traditions built up by their predecessors (Batstone et al: 1977). At KeyCo, the convenor is female, and one might anticipate problems, in an industry and union organisation traditionally dominated by men (Cockburn, 1991; Kirton and Healy, 1999). However, while she has indicated that she does face some opposition as a female convenor, especially in the tool room, (the founding area of the union and seen historically to be the most militant), her position has never been openly challenged and she was elected unopposed. Also, she has resigned in the past and was persuaded to stay on by an overwhelming show of support through a shopfloor petition. Women have also played a major role in the national union organisation since the early 1970s, with a female President elected in 1974. The workforce in the industry has also come to include far more women over the period since the 1970s. The take-over of LockCo in 1984 did see the initial introduction of some elements of new company communications such as team briefings, however they were resisted by the personnel department as being inappropriate to the existing pluralist, union-centred system and had little lasting resonance in the company (Ackers, 1988). Certainly, they have not lasted through until today. In summary, there are considerable historical similarities between LockCo and KeyCo with regard to the development of workplace union organisation. The union at KeyCo has come to occupy a less central and weakened institutional position in recent years, but this appears to be a relatively recent

development and thus sets the scene for an interesting comparison of views, attitudes, opinions and orientation towards the union at both companies.

The Wider Context

The time span of the research from the early 1980s to the late 1990s makes it particularly exciting and challenging because this period has also been one of significant change in the wider economic, political, legislative and ideological environment in Britain. 'Thatcherism' has been widely recognised as a 'turning point' for British industrial relations and reflecting this, there is a large body of literature offering varying perspectives on the extent of change, with which anyone who has been interested in the field will be familiar with (Marsh, 1992; Millward et al, 1992; McIlroy, 1995; MacInnes, 1987; Blyton and Turnbull, 1994; Hartley, 1992; Guest, 1987, 1991). It is worth noting that this thesis falls between the Conservative government of Mrs. Thatcher and the Labour government of Mr. Blair. Changes within the framework of British industrial relations are taking place, but the fieldwork for this thesis largely took place before this period of transition. It is also important to emphasise that this thesis is largely illustrative rather than representative, since LockCo has maintained an untypically stable and traditional workforce over the last two decades. The aim is to provide an ethnographically 'thick description' (See Chapter Three) of the workplaces studied.

This section of the Literature Review aims to chart the key institutional industrial relations changes of the 1980s and 1990s. It involves a discussion of the Thatcherite project with regard to trade unions, changes in legal regulations, the development of human resource management and the so called 'new industrial relations', and finally, the impact of policies of flexibility and the re-segmentation of labour markets. This discussion provides the wider context for developments, challenges and pressures within

which the actors in the employment relationships at the particular workplaces operate. This is important for the longitudinal study at LockCo, as any assessment of changes in employee attitudes and perceptions across this period requires comparison with the literature exploring change (or mooted change) in British industrial relations. Some aspects of trends and developments in this wider context have been influences upon union and management strategies within the lock workplaces. Debates about the anticipated effects of such change are discussed in the following sections. Ultimately, analysis of change and continuity over the period at LockCo, is related to the extent of embeddedness of the traditional culture, the impact of policies and strategies of management and of the union as mediating factors on external developments at workplace level (and which are discussed further in the sections 'Exploring the employment relationship' later in this Chapter). The comparison between LockCo and KeyCo in Chapter Four provides an investigation of the way in which alternative managerial and union strategies lead to differences in employee perceptions and attitudes, as well as the extent to which external developments are seen to influence the employment relationship within the workplaces.

Dramatic change in the nature of workplace relations might be anticipated, particularly with regard to trade unions, bearing in mind the weight of negative factors that British unions have faced since 1979. The expectation might be that the general salience of trade unions for workers has declined as unions have become less powerful and less demonstrably effective both in the workplace and at national level. Another change that has been suggested is that the permeation of individualistic ideals into the culture of the British workforce has led to an erosion of collectivism and a move to more individualistic expectations. Finally, as organisations have taken on more co-operative,

unitary ideologies, workers have come to feel more attachment to and shared identity as the company rather than to sectional groups, leading to a decline in feelings of 'them and us'; workers against management. Thus there are threats of 'new individualism' and 'new collectivism' facing unions (Bacon and Story, 1996).

A series of structural changes have undermined national union membership over the period. Britain has experienced increasing unemployment levels and the continuing decline of its manufacturing industry in terms of size and investment, with employment halving between 1979 and 1994. (However, output has increased slowly, passing 1979 levels after the 'short, sharp, shock' of the monetarist phase from 1979-81 when output fell by twenty percent. (Metcalf, 1989)). In addition, there has been the privatisation of public industries, the growth of non-manual workers, a tendency towards smaller work places, an increase in part-time employment and the shift towards services (Millward et al, 1992). These are all moves away from the traditionally unionised sectors of the economy and the typical profile of a union member (Green, 1991; Millward et al, 1992).

Lukes' (1974) typology of ways to analyse power identifies three aspects which, in this context would include; success in industrial conflicts, success in controlling the agenda of industrial relations (e.g. the scope of collective bargaining), and success in persuading an allegiance to a certain party. Arguably, one of the core objectives of Thatcherism was to shift the balance of forces in society radically and permanently in favour of Capital in the economy, and to the right in politics (Hall and Jacques 1983; Ackers 1988). Trade unions posed a twin evil, blocking the restoration of business profit through their emphasis on high wages, and through their reproduction of collectivist values alien to the individualism of Thatcherism (Richardson, 1996; Smith and Morton, 1993). It might be anticipated therefore that on each of Lukes' elements of power, the employer's position

has been consolidated whilst union power has considerably declined over the period. The government attempted to undermine trade union power with a legal offensive, by increasing the legal regulation of collective bargaining and trade union government, and by undermining the ability of trade unions to maintain work place organisation and engage in industrial action. Since 1979 there have been nine major statutes with the following cumulative effects. The blanket immunity enjoyed by the unions within the civil law has been removed; the legal basis for the closed shop was abolished; procedures for the election of officers has been tightened; and the scope for industrial action has narrowed with changes to the statutory definition of a trade dispute, requirements for balloting, and increased legal liability and financial penalties for unofficial action and damage claims (Marsh, 1992, Millward et al, 1992; Ackers et al, 1996; Dickens and Hall, 1995). The United Kingdom and Ireland are the only countries in the European Union in which there are no legal rights underpinning some form of collective employee representation at the workplace level (Terry, 1995: 219). In addition, with the dismantling of tri-partism with the abolition of organisations such as the Industrial Training Board and the National Enterprise Board, any representative political role that the unions had built up in the 1970's has diminished and they have had virtually no impact on legislation since 1979. However, the lock union itself has not suffered dramatic membership decline in terms of industry density (discussed earlier), but the possible affects of the legislative offensive may be anticipated and are highlighted by members interviewed over the period.

With regard to issues of ideology and culture, another objective in the push for the 'Enterprise Economy' was an attempt to restore the prominence of the individual contract between employer and employee as determined by the free play of market forces

(Wedderburn, 1989). Linked to the legislative offensive against unions, was a direct appeal to people as individual citizens and market agents rather than acknowledging a collective voice (of the working people) in the trade union movement. Government policy actively encouraged employers to abandon collective bargaining (Department of Employment, 1991), and employer's discretion over work organisation and employment relations increased as a result of the repeal of legislation controlling payment methods, employment of women and young people and minimum pay rates. The Thatcherite ideology can also be seen to have had an impact on management policy and consequently, the acceptance of the role of the trade union within the work place. The rhetoric of 'enterprise culture' (Fairclough, 1995) encouraged 'new' American popular management concepts such as Human Resource Management (HRM), Total Quality Management (TQM), employee involvement (EI) and empowerment. Here, the management language redefined workers as employees, individuals and teams, but not as organised collectives (Ackers et al, 1996; Marchington et al, 1992). The search for employee commitment has become increasingly important as a priority and the rhetoric suggests that improving employee commitment to the organisation will decrease the need for a collective institution to represent the interests of employees. (Marchington, 1995; Townley, 1994; Guest, 1987). Accordingly, part of HRM practice has been to replace the collective voice by direct communication with the individual employee (Purcell, 1991; Bacon, 1995). This unitarist view of organisations has also been highlighted in a desire to reduce the traditional adversarial relations between managers and employees. Researchers have noted that a major component of management rhetoric with regard to HRM is a desire to reduce 'them and us' attitudes, creating a set of expectations of the necessity to work together and for co-operation within the organisation (Kelly and Kelly, 1991; Grant, 1997). The definition of 'them and us' attitudes used by Kelly and Kelly

(1991) involves both the perception of a clear division between managers and workers, and a feeling of identification with one of these groups. Associated with such an attitude is often a belief that the groups have conflicting interests (Provis, 1996). The proposition of management rhetoric is that if the adversarial attitude could be reduced, then one might see a reduction in the collectivist attachment to the union organisation on an ideological level, accompanied by a reduction in solidaristic action in the pursuit of union goals. (Links to later discussion of 'dual commitment')

One of the main controversies has been whether new management initiatives adopted in the 1980s have fundamentally changed the climate of labour management relations and whether there has been a reduction of 'them and us' attitudes. These techniques have spanned different spheres of work including reward systems, work organisation, decision-making and employee communications programmes. These new initiatives have been described as new industrial relations techniques (NIR) and the reduction of 'them and us' attitudes has been cited as one of the main reasons that British employers have introduced certain NIR techniques (Kelly and Kelly, 1991; Guest et al, 1993). Employers have thus attempted to change the industrial relations climate and the nature of commitment to union and company. Bassett stated that "*NIR entails the replacement of the class struggle with the struggle for markets. No longer us (the workers) against them (the management), but us (the company) against them (the competitors)*" (1986:174). These debates are pertinent to this research because a unitarist desire to increase employee commitment to the organisation and for the organisation to work as a team is obvious in the more recent rhetoric of managers at the lock companies; particularly that of the new multi-national management who have taken over the two firms.

Another central 'watchword' of the trends of reform of company structure and work organisation has been flexibility, including de-regulation of labour markets, multi-skilling across functions and occupations, and the segmentation and polarisation of employment between different categories of worker (Ackers et al, 1996). Flexibility policies have a potential for detrimental impact on trade unions. Atkinson's (1989) model of the flexible firm, incorporating both numerical and functional flexibility with its core and periphery, constitutes a threat to traditional union organisation based around full time employees and traditional issues of collective bargaining such as craft demarcations and working time (Pollert, 1991). Looking at what has happened over the period, in order to compare this with rhetoric; there has been a decline in union membership since 1979 of nearly 32% (IER, 1994), and WIRS/WERS evidence (Cully et al, 1998; Millward et al, 1992) charts a significant trend towards union derecognition. By 1998, union recognition had fallen to 45% from 53% in 1990, and the proportion of workplaces with no union members at all has increased from 27% in 1984 to 47% in 1998. In addition, the scope of bargaining has narrowed and on a number of workplace issues, union representatives felt that they were given no information, let alone consulted, about events (Cully et al, 1998: 18). There has also been a dramatic decline in the incidence of strikes (traditionally seen as an indicator of union power: Terry, 1986) which has fallen by about half between 1984 and 1990 with only one in ten manufacturing workplaces affected in 1990 compared to a third of establishments in 1979. With regard to attitudes, Marsh (1992) saw shop stewards as taking a more defensive and co-operative attitude towards management in the face of an increasing threat of job losses and diminished union power. An hypothesis would follow that strike action had fallen not only because of the limitations imposed by legislation but also because employees are not willing to take the risk in an unstable labour market and

unfavourable economic climate. Several authors (Terry, 1989; Marchington and Parker, 1990) referred to the 'marginalisation' of shop stewards as a characteristic of the 1980s. A review of existing case study evidence (Terry, 1995: 215-217) tends to support the analysis that shop stewards and their organisations have been weakened and marginalised and that stewards themselves are more vulnerable than they were in earlier periods. Thus, a "fear factor" (Metcalf, 1989) had stimulated increased employee productivity and acceptance of harsher working practices in the early 1980's. While employers staged an assault on over-staffing and inefficiency due to fear of bankruptcy, employees were prepared to work harder due to fear of job loss. A synthesis of large scale survey evidence (Bacon, 1995) registers increasing feelings of job insecurity over the period. With this "fear factor" prevalent, one could hypothesise that employees would feel less inclined to support a union's bargaining in the workplace for fear of antagonising the employer. Also, unions themselves would have less bargaining power, and employers might be less inclined to pursue a collaborative policy towards unions.

Some unions have responded to the membership trends, and decline in influence over the period, with initiatives that seem to encourage a more individualistic form of trade union membership. The mainstream union movement, through the TUC, has promoted a new realist agenda, presenting a softer, more friendly image to employers and workers alike, emphasising the need to co-operate with and have a moderate stance towards management (Ackers et al, 1996). Some unions chose to take advantage of the opportunities offered by companies wanting to negotiate single union deals, while others established forms of 'business trade unionism', through the development of financial services, insurance and other individual benefits (Blyton and Turnbull, 1994). While evidence indicates that the incidence of single union deals and examples of sophisticated

'business unionism' is small (Cohen, 1991), some aspects of the 'business unionism' strategy may be more widespread. Many unions began to offer more individualistic benefits. Indeed this was encouraged by the Special Review Body set up by the TUC in 1987, recommending that unions offer packages of what Willman and Cave (1994) call 'costless benefits', such as financial services. The lock union has followed this example, building in more individual financial, insurance and health benefits to their existing membership package. Debate has thus focused around whether these kind of individual benefits have become more important to union members leading to a more individualistic commitment to trade unions (Kelly and Heery, 1997). In addition, British unions have experienced a wave of merger activity since 1979 which is reflected in the declining number and increasing concentration of British unions (Black et al, 1997). Unions with 100,000 or more members now account for almost 90% of all TUC-affiliated membership and the eight largest unions account for over 60% of the total membership (Buchanan, 1992). The level of merger activity led some to predict that the structure of the future labour movement would see a small number of super-unions by the year 2000 (Aston, 1987). This prediction appears to be fulfilled by the creation of extremely large unions such as Manufacturing, Science and Finance (MSF) in 1989, the Amalgamated Engineering and Electrical Union (AEEU) in 1992 and Unison in 1993. Against this background, the lock union, with 3500 members and its unwillingness to merge with a larger union provided an interesting case in terms of membership expectations and union effectiveness over the period.

The changes within the wider context are largely uncontested, but the nature of their impact on manufacturing work place union organisation is an area of much debate. There are some who point out the limited impact of external changes on unions (Kelly, 1995;

Millward et al, 1992; McIlroy, 1995). The overall structural resilience of the lock union organisation at the two lock companies has already been discussed. While there are significant trends towards a contraction of collective arrangements, there is also evidence for some continuity. WIRS evidence, particularly the second study (Millward and Stevens, 1986; Millward et al 1992; Kelly, 1987), whilst highlighting areas of change, has also pointed to the enduring resilience of union power, role and organisation where it was still established despite a decade of attack. McIlroy (1995) plays down the significance of the membership decline by emphasising the ability of unions to maintain a density of 43% and a membership of 9 million. Shop steward organisation appears to have changed little with collective bargaining remaining central, even if narrower in scope. Overall, there are important continuities in workplace organisation which might lead one to suggest similar continuities in attitude. McIlroy (1995) has also pointed to the lack of evidence for major shifts in the attitudes of employees to unions from large scale surveys such as the British Social Attitudes Surveys, which indicate that there is still a high degree of principled support (Bacon, 1995; Jowell et al, 1990). The WIRS3 survey (Millward et al, 1992) established that there has been little change in the primary focus of members with the traditional issues of pay and conditions still ranked as the top two reasons for membership. In some situations, notably those with relatively slowly changing economic conditions and a well entrenched tradition of local activism (similar to those of the two lock companies in this thesis), there is evidence of considerable union resilience at workplace level (Fairbrother, 1990; Darlington, 1994; Terry, 1995; 220).

There has also been a debate about whether strike action is to be seen as a sign of union power or weakness (See Edwards, 1983: 223, Terry, 1993) which is reflected in the discourse of those workers interviewed as part of this thesis (See Chapter Four, Section

Two). Similarly, survey research by Waddington and Whitson (1992, 1994) indicates that there appears to be little evidence of employee attitudes becoming more individualistic in terms of reasons for joining a trade union. The majority of new members cite traditional reasons of pay and conditions with less than 5% of new members joining because of the availability of individual benefits such as financial services. With regard to new union strategies, evidence indicates that the incidence of single-union deals, mergers and examples of 'sophisticated business unionism' are very small and thus may be expected to have less effect on employee attitudes, save in a limited number of cases (Ackers and Smith, 1996; Cohen, 1991).

There is also little consensus about the impact of managerial initiatives on British union organisation. The 1980s debate about 'macho management' (Edwardes, 1983), generally concluded that empirical evidence pointed to its limited extent (McInnes, 1987; Kelly, 1987; Edwards, 1985). Managers had not significantly attempted to gain control over their employees or attempted to undermine the position of trade unions in their organisations (Marchington and Parker, 1990; Marsh, 1992). McInnes (1987) pointed out that while there was a public retreat from tri-partism, this has not meant that employers proceed to abolish previous policies in the work place, indeed employers may have an interest in maintaining good relations with their work force through the trade union. Similarly, while the changes in the nature of the labour market should not be downplayed, much research points to a more limited extent of "flexibility" policies and the "flexible firm" than originally advocated (Tomaney 1990, Pollert 1988). Where flexibility policies have on the surface appeared to exclude the role of the union, Pollert (1996) indicates how shop steward involvement can be vital in order to sustain team working in the practice of flexibility policies in the work place. Alford (1994) too, points

to the important role unions can play in helping to introduce change to work organisation. In the face of the failure of policies designed to by-pass the union, some employers have returned to policies with characteristics of social partnership (Pollert, 1996; Ackers and Payne, 1998).

With regard to attitudes, Kelly and Kelly's (1991) research led them to conclude that little impact was seen from NIR techniques in reducing "them and us" attitudes. The limited employee involvement in the design and implementation of NIR schemes within a context of economic crisis often worked against attitude change and actually increased antagonism between the two groups. Additionally, new techniques were found most often to be grafted onto existing authority relations, with the deep-seated traditions of conflict remaining (Grant, 1997; Buchanan and Preston, 1992; Elger and Fairbrother, 1992). While it is important to recognise the limitations of large-scale surveys, Bacon's (1995) synthesis of survey evidence also supports a view that there remains an overall perception amongst British employees, that the interests of workers and managers remain opposed. The British Social Attitudes Survey of 1992 indicates that over 50% of respondents agreed with the statement that *'full co-operation in firms is impossible because workers and managers are really on opposite sides'* (Bacon, 1995). In addition this survey evidence also suggests that notwithstanding some notable exceptions (Black and McCabe, 1996), employee identification with their companies had declined, relations with managers have not improved, and employees feel that communications have deteriorated since the mid 1980s. (Bacon, 1995).

There is thus a lack of consensus in the literature as to the extent and nature of changes in British industrial relations. Many writers have pointed to the gap between the expectations generated by popular management concepts and union initiatives, and the

practice of industrial relations (Legge, 1989). The precise form of any kind of 'new workplace' or new employment relations has been difficult to identify and has perhaps been most obscure in relation to local workplace settings. The impact of the wider industrial relations influences must be seen within the context of the work place, where influences may be mediated at the institutional level, by the specific unions, managers, workers and the companies with whom they deal. The foregoing discussion is relevant to the analysis of the findings presented in Chapter Five. Firstly, the longitudinal comparison at LockCo provides an opportunity to assess the resilience of a workplace union organisation in face of the external threats and challenges presented. The strength of the union organisation at LockCo and relative weakness at KeyCo, is an issue that emerges from the findings in Chapter Four. This is discussed within a framework which investigates issues of union leader and management strategies, the terms of engagement between union and management, and their impact on employee perceptions of commitment and trust. All of these are key themes of the Literature Review discussed in the following sections of this chapter. Secondly, the comparison between LockCo and KeyCo also provides an opportunity to explore alternative questions to the longitudinal comparison. They are discussed in terms of the same themes, but also focus on the way that differences can be explained by specific variation in managerial and union strategies at the two companies. Both comparisons look at the interaction between the wider environment and the workplace context in assessing the impact of wider industrial relations developments. This assessment is necessary, forming possible contingent or influencing factors in an analysis and explanation of employee perceptions of the employment relationship, and of the nature of commitment and trust; questions which lie at the heart of this thesis. Aspects of this discussion of the main IR changes have been prioritised and will be reflected and drawn upon in the analysis of the findings in Chapter

Five. They comprise: the implications of the Thatcherite project regarding trade unions and new managerial theories and techniques, for the salience and centrality of trade unions and collectivism in the workplace.

Exploring the Employment Relationship: Theoretical Debates

The sections above have outlined the context of the research, both at the micro level, looking at the historical and sociological traditions of the firms and industry, and at the macro level, within the wider environment of British industrial relations. Within the discussion of the local context, key themes of inquiry included firstly, the implications for perceptions of the employment relationship, of the decline of a traditional paternalistic management style within a company with long historical traditions. Secondly, the KeyCo comparison identifies an area of inquiry based around the impact and influence of new managerial styles and strategies on such perceptions within a similar context. Within the discussion of the wider context, certain themes and debates have been prioritised and highlighted as areas of discussion for the analysis of the findings of this thesis. Most of the debate has focused on the extent and nature of changes in British industrial relations since 1979. These debates have flagged up certain key areas that one might anticipate would have had impact on the nature of the employment relationship within the lock companies.

The purpose of the rest of this chapter is to present some of the debates which are key to an understanding of the nature of the employment relationship at workplace level, and

that connect the various theoretical strands of the research. Firstly, a discussion of the concept of 'dual commitment', which is given an extensive exploration, in order to establish the utility of the concept to this thesis. This degree of exploration is needed because, as will be discussed later, this is a concept that has been borrowed, from a predominantly psychological field and used here, in a qualitatively different way. The concept per se, is not investigated within this thesis, but rather its use is in analysing and attempting to understand the changing worker perceptions of the employment relationship. The concept firstly draws attention to, the importance of looking at employee attitudes towards the company in relation to those towards the union. It is in the consideration and critique of its historical development and the ways in which it has been commonly defined and used, that its significance and utility lies. This highlights how the underlying notion of 'dual commitment', as used and explored in this thesis, is more problematic than is often presented. The findings of this thesis point to a view of the employment relationship as based around 'structured antagonisms' (Edwards, 1995). These structured antagonisms are potentially more problematic in the context of modern managerial techniques, within a unitarist, rather than pluralist approach ⁴ (relating back to the earlier discussion of the development of HRM and new industrial relations).

This leads naturally onto the second issue identified as connecting the theoretical strands of the research, to what I have referred to as the terms of engagement between union and management. The discussion and exploration of 'dual commitment' and the idea of 'structured antagonisms' and how they are constructed and made sense of by workers, places a focus on the way in which the union representatives and management interact at the workplace level. This involves; the way that the terms of this interaction (or

⁴ Personal communications with Mike Terry, February 1999

engagement) impact upon the effectiveness of the union organisation, and management policy at workplace level, and the way in which this influenced and influences perceptions of the employment relationship (both within the longitudinal and contemporaneous comparisons) which are explored in Chapters Four and Five.

Dual Commitment

Development of the concept

The concept of 'dual commitment'/dual allegiance/dual identity/dual loyalty (as it is variably referred to) is by no means a new one. The notion that employees may have simultaneous or 'dual commitment' to their companies and their unions has stimulated research for over four decades (Angle and Perry, 1986; Bemmels, 1995; Dean, 1954; Purcell, 1954; Fryer and Martin, 1973). The concept appeared to be of immediate relevance for my research subject looking at the changing nature of the employment relationship. Firstly, the main question identified as forming the basis for the 'dual commitment' research twenty five years ago, fits in with one of the recurrent themes of this thesis. This was the question of how far employees can be committed to both the union and to the company, as to whether there is a 'trade-off' between the two parties (Angle and Perry, 1986). After about 1960, the issue of 'dual commitment' lay essentially dormant and the question unresolved until the early 1980s, when a new generation of researchers raised it again. While the original question still remains salient, Deery et al (1994) outline the main reasons for the rekindling of interest in the concept (which include a number of key areas discussed above within the debates around 'the wider context'). These include: mounting pressures on manufacturers and unions to develop co-operative approaches to the problems of international competition; and

questions about whether the wider use of HRM policies may have increased organisational commitment at the expense of union loyalty. In addition, existing contextual factors have led to a focus on questions about why unions have survived despite industrial, political, legislative and ideological developments in the wider society which are antagonistic to them. These more recent 'dual commitment' researchers have highlighted a need to look at the distinctive aspects of an individual's attachments to organisations and the need to focus on the nature of commitment to both company and union (Van der Veen and Klandermans, 1995; Sverke and Kuruvilla, 1995). Such areas of inquiry are relevant to this thesis, looking at both the local context (with management at the lock companies introducing new initiatives) and the wider context in Britain (focusing on the key issues highlighted earlier as priorities for analysis within this thesis.)

Existing research

A review of the literature identifies some common characteristics of existing research using the 'dual commitment' concept. (As discussed earlier, it is within this consideration and critique, that the utility of 'dual commitment' to this thesis is explored.) As well as the contextual impetuses for the rekindling of interest in the concept, there has been the development of a strong research theme around the concept of organisational commitment (Porter et al, 1974) and the construction of a reliable measure of union commitment (Gordon et al, 1980). This enabled researchers to test more effectively the generality of propositions about organisational and union commitment in a variety of work settings. Most 'dual commitment' research has therefore tended to build upon these two seminal studies. Research can be identified at two levels of analysis. One is at the individual level focusing on distinguishing between

individuals who are and those who are not committed to both union and employer. The other is at the organisational level focusing on determining the extent to which 'dual commitment' is present at specific organisational settings and identifying the conditions or situations under which 'dual commitment' is most likely to be present (Bemmels, 1995; Reed et al, 1994). This thesis primarily involves investigation of commitment at the level of the individual but also looking for shared identities and world views among the groups of workers and attempting to explain or understand the nature of these perceptions.

Both approaches have tended to use similar methods. These are quantitative, statistics based, cross-sectional research designs, with the predominant survey method being by postal questionnaire. Results have been verified and validated using factor analysis and Hartley (1992) comments on the multitude of factor analytical studies that have poured into the journals. The measurement of 'dual commitment' has most commonly involved separate criterion measures of company and union commitment, the scores of which are then compared to identify significant positive correlations between the two measures, as evidence of 'dual commitment'. In summarising a body of literature on 'dual commitment', Reed et al (1994) identified forty nine studies, all of which were quantitative factor analysis research designs. Similarly, it was interesting to note that all of the studies featured in the 'Special Edition on Union Commitment' in the Journal of Organisational Behaviour (Vol. 16, 1995) were quantitative, postal questionnaire studies; some using statistical survey information across a whole country. Hartley (1992) points out that apart from Gordon et al (1980), there have been very few studies, if any, which have even used interview techniques. One of the original 'dual commitment' studies by Dean (1954) involved a variety of methods including extensive periods of observation

and interviews, as well as more quantitative surveys, however this added qualitative focus does not appear to have been taken up by her successors in the field.

The existing literature suffers from a lack of qualitative methodologies. In addition, focusing specifically on the connected issue of union membership, Guest and Dewe (1991) point out that research to date has been largely based on macro studies which have highlighted general trends but not variations within those trends. This has therefore led to a widespread call for more case study and in depth research to complement the existing cross sectional and factor analytical studies (Hartley, 1992; Guest and Dewe, 1991). As Hartley states: *“There is a need for case study approaches to complement the quantitative studies. It seems unlikely that further insights into union or ‘dual commitment’ will be made solely on the basis of further factor analyses”* (1992: 221). In particular, there is a need for longitudinal designs (Hartley, 1992; Gordon and Ladd, 1990; Parks et al, 1995). This gap is only significant, of course, if there are problems with the quantitative nature of existing studies, and if qualitative studies have significant benefits. With regard to longitudinal studies, one of the impetuses for ‘dual commitment’ research is the analysis of the impact of management policies, new industrial relations techniques (Kelly and Kelly, 1991), and the wider economic and political environment. It would then seem logical to suggest that cross-sectional designs cannot present a detailed enough picture of how ‘dual commitment’ varies with contingent conditions over time. This thesis, with its qualitative and longitudinal approach, makes use of ‘dual commitment’ in a different way, focusing not on developing measures of ‘dual commitment’, but trying to understand the wider factors which lead to particular shared perceptions of the employment relationship, and levels of commitment and trust to the parties to that relationship. Additionally, (as is explored within the findings and within

the analysis chapter), this enables a consideration of the problematic nature of commitment, trust and identity with management and the union, within the 'structured antagonisms' of the employment relationship.

Apart from the predominance of quantitative studies, most of the research in the 'dual commitment' area has also been developed and tested in the USA and Canada (Trimpop, 1995; Van der Veens and Klandermans, 1995). There is a scarcity of research in Britain, with the notable exception of Guest and Dewe (1991). This is of theoretical importance as Trimpop's (1995) study in Germany identified that national structural and cultural factors lead to conceptual differences in 'dual commitment'. In addition, research outside the USA has not identified either the same levels of 'dual commitment', nor the same impact of structural variables such as industrial relations climate (to be discussed more fully later) (Guest and Dewe, 1991; Deery et al, 1994). This has emphasised the need for a contextual focus rather than a focus on individual instruments (Klandermans, 1989; Walker and Lawler, 1979). Sherer and Morishima (1989) made an attempt to include some aspects of the organisational context, finding industrial and sectoral factors to be contextual moderators on levels of 'dual commitment'. This makes the nature of the small, compact British lock industry an attractive research setting. However, while Sherer and Morishima were concerned with economic issues such as the market rate for the industry, this thesis is more concerned with micro issues such as the impact of the historical and sociological traditions and developments of the industry, occupational community and individual workplaces. Existing studies investigating union membership have also seen numerous writers pointing to the local, contextual nature of unionism (Van der Veen and Klandermans, 1995; Sverke and Kuruvilla, 1995; Tetrick, 1995; Reed et al, 1995). Sverke and Kuruvilla in particular emphasised the need to focus on

members' commitment to their local union, and not unionism in general or some abstract concept of unionism which has been the case in most studies. They see this as an incorrect reading of Porter et al's (1974) definition of commitment which focused on the specific organisation, not company commitment in general. There may be very different patterns of union consciousness at local workplace and community settings which belies the idea of a single union experience (see Goldthorpe et al, 1968). Unions may not all have the same goals, or the same centrality to individual workers' lives, and so the focus should be on specific unionised settings, which lends weight to my case study approach. As will be discussed in Chapter Five, this exploration of employee perceptions of their commitment to, and identity with their union and management, highlights the influence that the terms of engagement between the union and management have on the nature of the 'union experience' at the two companies. Iverson and Kuruvilla (1995) commented on the fact that few studies have looked specifically at the structural and cultural backgrounds of the work settings. This thesis can thus make a contribution, by its strong emphasis on the influence of the local and specific workplace context, on workers' perceptions of their work lives and their attachments to social groups.

Looking at more specific contextual factors, there is a bias towards studies in white collar work settings. Where a few blue-collar studies have been conducted, they have been exclusively in the USA. This research is based around the perceptions and attitudes of a group of blue-collar workers and is also based in a traditional area of British industrial relations research. Hartley (1992) pointed out that this predominant concern with traditional manufacturing industries in the private sector may have missed the valuable study of those non-traditional work settings especially in smaller, non-union and service organisations. Certainly it is in these non-traditional work settings that much

change has been seen, but equally, the more traditional areas should not be ignored in the debate about changes in British industrial relations. It is perhaps the private, heavy manufacturing sector in Britain that has experienced the most change since 1979 (Marsh, 1992; IER, 1994) and which, (with long historical and sociological traditions as at my research company), might be expected to face the greatest challenges from a changed environment of work. The particular research setting of this thesis is also an interesting and suitable one in which to investigate 'dual commitment', with very similar characteristics to those emphasised by Guest and Dewe (1991) as justifications for their research. The workplace is characterised by a well established relationship between the union and management, a dominant pluralist perspective, little industrial conflict, integrative bargaining procedures, and a long term acceptance of a legitimate union role by management; a context which would seem to favour the development of 'dual commitment'. This thesis, with its comparison between LockCo and KeyCo in particular, provides an opportunity to investigate the way in which different managerial and union strategies can affect perceptions of commitment and trust and of the structured antagonisms of the employment relationship. These issues will be dealt with in Chapter Five.

There are also some theoretical weaknesses of existing research in the area of 'dual commitment', associated with the predominance of quantitative methodologies. Gordon and Ladd (1990) note the confusion in the field, both due to lack of theoretical clarity and methodological problems (see also Sverke and Kuruvilla, 1995; Hartley, 1992; Bemmels, 1995; Reed et al, 1994). Bearing in mind that most studies place an emphasis on statistical validity, serious statistical weaknesses have been identified, especially when claims are made for the existence of 'dual commitment' from correlations between the

separate commitment scales (Bemmel, 1995; Angle and Perry, 1986). In addition, there has also been criticism of the implicit assumption in much research on 'dual commitment', that union commitment is similar in concept and structure to the more general concept of organisational/company commitment.^{5,6}

This has led to controversy about the definition and measurement of 'dual commitment' and the proper analysis of the resulting data. The use of the concept in this thesis does assume that commitment to either company or union can be seen as based on similar variables, however it is not an attempt to develop a measure of 'dual commitment'. The issues of commitment to company and union are dealt with separately in discussions with workers and one area of interest is in finding out whether there is a trade off between identities with different social groups rather than establishing antecedents and determinants of 'dual commitment' in any rigorous, positivist way. What is more significant however, in terms of this thesis, is to try and 'get underneath' perceptions of the employment relationship and the nature of the 'structured antagonisms' that are found. Delete line as not taken to closure in conclusions.

It is also hard to compare the different 'dual commitment' studies, firstly because of the considerable variation in the way that 'dual commitment' is measured (use of different selections of items from either the Porter et al (1974) and the Gordon et al (1980) measurements). Secondly, commitment has been described in many diverse ways. Angle and Perry (1986) review the diverse conceptual frameworks for commitment and their

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This links to the sociological literature placing a focus on variations in class consciousness and ideas of 'unionnateness' (Mann, 1973; Blackburn and Prandey, 19)

⁶ While beyond the remit of the discussion of 'dual commitment' as relevant to this thesis, for the debate about whether 'dual commitment' is an independent variable, relationship between variable of union or company commitment, or situationally dependent variable, See Gordon and Ladd, 1990; Bemmel, 1995; Angle and Perry, 1986).

operational definitions which have created a situation in which it is very difficult to make direct comparisons among commitment studies (see also Hartley, 1992; Guest and Dewe, 1991). This confusion about the conceptual clarity, measurement and analysis of data, has led to a situation where research has primarily focused on the search for conceptually meaningful and valid measures of 'dual commitment'; in other words, the measurement of 'dual commitment' has become an end in itself (Hartley, 1992).

In summary therefore, there appear to be good reasons for adopting an alternative approach to the study of 'dual commitment'. Hartley (1992) highlights the need for researchers to move away from attempts to use the newly developed scales of company and union commitment and analyse the minutiae of factors and antecedents. The current tendency to rely on survey instruments and macro studies appears to encourage such an approach. This is not the way (as noted above) that I employ the concept of 'dual commitment'. To reiterate the relevance of the concept to this thesis; the interest in the 'dual commitment' debate, is primarily in the implications that it has for analysing and attempting to understand the changing perceptions of the employment relationship between workers, management, and the union, rather than trying to develop more rigorous measures of the levels of 'dual commitment' itself. The concept has been borrowed from a largely psychological field as a bridging concept for the various strands of the research. This thesis thus offers the opportunity to study the concept of 'dual commitment' through a qualitative methodology, allowing the complexities of commitment, identity and trust which lie at the heart of the analysis to be uncovered. It also meets the need for research in Britain, in a blue-collar setting, and most importantly it is a longitudinal study, investigating how commitment to the union and company have changed and developed over a fifteen year period.

Having discussed the ways in which 'dual commitment' has commonly been used in research, the next section goes on to make explicit, the specific nature of the way that the concept has been used in this thesis.

The Use and Development of Dual Commitment in this Thesis

The thesis is based at a socio-psychological level, pulling together the importance of studying the attitudes, perceptions and self reported orientations of workers and linking this to changes in the contextual setting in which these workers find themselves. Some approaches to the study of 'dual commitment' support such an emphasis. The confusion over the theoretical clarity of 'dual commitment' and commitment in more general terms also weighs against trying to establish statistically valid measures. In meeting these criticisms, it is important to at least establish a broad definition of commitment. Porter et al's (1974) approach essentially treated commitment in terms of individual's psychological attachments to social groups. This is useful because it fits in more with moral involvement rather than commitment as having a purely calculative basis (Etzioni, 1975). Gordon et al's (1980) four-item union commitment scale builds on Porter et al. However, Guest and Dewe (1991) criticise Porter et al's definition for containing both process and outcome dimensions. Desire to maintain membership of an organisation and willingness to work hard on behalf of the organisation can be seen as logical consequences of identity with an organisation. I agree, therefore, with Guest and Dewe (1991) that there should be a focus on the core concept of commitment as identity with the organisation. Here, the term commitment is based largely on socio-psychological attachments, orientations and identities to the social groups existing in the particular work setting, rather than behaviour. The research design has allowed only limited assessment of the ways in which professed attitudes and perceptions are translated into

behaviour. However, the in-depth case study approach has allowed an investigation of commitment in Guest and Dewe's (1991) terms in a more extended way. They appeared to limit their investigation to whether or not management and union decisions reflected workers' opinions (which is seen as *accountability* in the vocabulary of this thesis). However an assessment of identity should also include elements of pride, loyalty, willingness to put in effort for the organisation, and trust. This last element of *trust* is a major component of the study of industrial relations climate discussed later, and has generated a great deal of inquiry, with trust being increasingly seen as a key factor in organisational well being and the success of organisation change (Fox, 1974: 13; Cook and Wall, 1980; Blyton et al, 1987; Fukuyama, 1995).

This focus on attitudes thus meets the call from many writers investigating both union and company commitment, for more attention to be placed on socio-psychological factors (Hartley, 1992; Kelly and Kelly, 1991; Van der Veen and Klandermans, 1995) such as attitudes, loyalties, values, identities; all of which might be expected to respond to changed conditions of work and on which an investigation of such mooted changes should rely. A better understanding of these identities and loyalties are needed if we are to be able to predict or interpret the impact of the wider context and of company and union policies on workers' attitudes and behaviours. There is also little detailed knowledge about the identities and loyalties of workers in British industry and of the factors that explain variations in identification with company or union at least from an industrial relations perspective (Guest and Dewe, 1991). This again highlights a relevance of this research. The thesis thus fits into the theoretical area of sociological studies which have looked at worker identities from a different perspective, such as those focusing on ideas of class consciousness (Goldthorpe et al, 1968; Lockwood, 1958), or

those which have looked at how workers in particular communities view their organisations and environments (Bulmer, 1975).

Important components of any study into 'dual commitment' are the separate aspects of individuals' attachments to the union and to the company. An attitudinal or socio-psychological focus also has strengths in these areas. In order to understand changes in union membership for example, we need to know how employees view trade unions, why they join, and what benefits they derive (Guest and Dewe, 1991; Sverke and Kuruvilla, 1995). The study of union commitment can be seen as part of the central fabric of trade unions *"since the ability of unions.. to attain their goals is generally based on the members' loyalty, belief in the objective of organised labour and willingness to provide services voluntarily"* (Gordon et al, 1980, 480; see also Sverke and Kuruvilla, 1995). This involves questions about how identity with the union or the company is likely to be influenced by perceptions of the role and effectiveness of the union and management. This is also discussed further in the following section dealing with 'the terms of engagement' between union and management.

This involves looking at the nature of willingness to mobilise support behind the union and have a participatory involvement in union activities. Union involvement can be seen as comprising both participation in and commitment to the local union (Fosh, 1993). An emphasis is placed however, on a view of participation as multi-dimensional; best seen as a continuum from information-seeking to full involvement at decision-making meetings, rather than the majority of past studies into participation which have concentrated on formal methods (Parks et al, 1995). Taking part in industrial action is also seen as a form of participation. The debate about member's attitudes has been polarised around the issue of whether employees have an instrumental or ideological

commitment to unions. The purely instrumental view claims that members only give passive compliance to what unions do in their name and do not share the wider social, cultural and political goals (Taylor, 1978). The individual has no economic incentive to get involved in wider union issues or attend union meetings as they will receive all the benefits anyway (Olsen 1965). Guest and Dewe's (1988) research into 'dual commitment' lent support to an instrumental explanation of membership attitudes to their union. On the other hand, while the correlation of social solidarity and union membership was problematical (Guest and Dewe, 1988), other studies have found that it was not irrelevant (Deery and DeCieri, 1991). Fosh's model (1993: 579) establishes two types of union commitment. The first looks at member commitment to union solidarity and its opposite state where the member has an individualistic attachment to the union. The second involves commitment to union goals where the member has an ideological commitment to unionism (the union is seen as having social and political goals) and its opposite state where the member has an instrumental conception of unionism (as a means to the ends of the individual or workgroup). Members can have elements of both kinds of commitment and workplace participation was found to fluctuate over time. In addition, looking at another model, it should be noted that individualism is not necessarily to be opposed with collectivism (Fox, 1985: 6). Fox makes a distinction between 'organic' collectivism, (where people may be willing to support a collective cause which transcends individual interests), and 'instrumental' collectivism, (where there is no transcendent significance, and collective action commands adherence as long as it serves individual interests more effectively than individual action)⁷. This highlights the complexity of the concept of collectivism and the difficulty in determining the level and kind of collective consciousness that anybody holds. The issue of collective action

⁷In some respects, this has echoes in Fosh's typology of union commitment (See chapter Two, page).

and employee willingness to take collective action is part of the inquiry into the nature of commitment within this thesis (see later discussion) and forms part of the analysis in Chapter Five

The debate is thus unresolved, however in terms of what other studies have found, rather than Taylor's (1978) 'passive compliance' view, most members within Fosh's (1993) study were found to have an underlying solidaristic sentiment that could be demonstrated in collective action when necessary. Similarly, Nicholson et al (1981) similarly concluded that rather than seeing union participation as only an instrumental vehicle, there was a collectivist notion of shared values, sentiments and opinions apparent among members. There is a strong case to be made for the fact that a union cannot be demonstrably effective (and meet expectations), without being able to mobilise membership support (Fosh, 1993; Barling et al, 1992; Offe, 1985). Fosh has pointed to the significance of the attitude line between solidarity and individualism, as the ability of the union to deliver collective pressure can be seen as a pre-requisite for the success of bargaining at work.

In addition, the view that a psychological contract exists between unions and companies and their members is relevant (Tetrick, 1995; Sinclair and Tetrick, 1995; Sherer and Morishima, 1989; Shore et al, 1994). Similarly, Barling et al (1992: 67) point out that the issue of unionisation (for which union commitment is seen as a major component), can be seen as akin to the development of a psychological contract between the union and members. Stemming from exchange theory (Heath, 1971; Blau, 1964), and building on Rousseau (1989), this view highlights that aside from the formal employment contract, implied and psychological contracts are a central aspect of employment relations. Implied contracts result from the interactions between the parties that result in shared

norms and predictable patterns of relations. The conception of the psychological contract here, is that it represents an individuals' belief that there is a mutual, reciprocal obligation between the organisation (company or union) and themselves. Psychological contracts thus represent member's expectations with respect to their treatment by the company or union and their individual roles within the organisation. This makes it important to investigate attitudinal orientations, most notably, members' expectations regarding their treatment by the organisation and their individual roles within the organisation. The psychological contract is seen as a central influence on the development and maintenance of commitment. The themes of interest within this thesis continue to overlap, indeed, Fox (1974: 71) details the connections between contract/exchange theory and the issue of trust.

While most research studies have adopted a parallel approach to 'dual commitment', (where separate measures of company and union commitment are used and then compared to find correlations), they have found few variables which are common predictors of both company and union commitment. However, the one variable which has been found to have an impact on both forms of commitment has been a co-operative industrial relations climate (Angle and Perry, 1986; Sherer and Morishima, 1989; Deery et al, 1994; Tetrick, 1995; Sinclair and Tetrick, 1995; Guest and Dewe, 1991). The industrial relations climate can be seen to involve perceptions of kinds of norms and atmospheres surrounding the practice of union-management relations within the organisation (Blyton et al, 1987). Most commonly, this involves "*the relative amounts of ambient conflict or co-operation that reside in the two parties orientations towards one another.. as labour and management interact in a given setting over time, each develops a somewhat stable frame of reference regarding the orientations of the other party; in*

effect, this frame of reference describes where the fundamental relationship lies along a co-operation-conflict continuum” (Angle and Perry, 1986: 35). This fits in with the more general uses of the term industrial relations for this research outlined in the Chapter One. In terms of this research with its triangular model of the employment relationship however, the definition of climate offered by Angle and Perry (1986) would be amended to a three party relationship between workers, union and management rather than necessarily treating the interests of union and workers as the same. It also links to the emphasis on socio-psychological attachments to social groups, indeed, this operational definition is concerned with attitudinal concepts such as orientations and perceptions. While there is much support for the influence of the industrial relations climate on the nature of ‘dual commitment’ (and vice versa), there is less consensus about the what this influence is. (This fits in with the similar debate explored in the section of this chapter dealing with ‘the wider context’ where I note little consensus on the impact or existence of a ‘new industrial relations’ referring to new managerial techniques designed to increase company commitment and ideas of social partnership). There appears to be an implicit assumption in existing ‘dual commitment’ literature that if employees can be committed to both company and union then this will provide opportunities for co-operation and increased productivity and may in fact be necessary for the success of co-operative labour-management programmes (Hartley, 1992). As established earlier, this is one of the reasons suggested for the resurgence of interest in the area. Much of the US research has supported such a claim, finding that where employees held positive perceptions about the general ambient climate of union-management relations, they were significantly more likely to be committed to both union and company (Angle and Perry, 1986; Sherer and Morishima, 1989; Magenau et al, 1988; Beauvais et al, 1991). Accordingly, the practitioner advice has been that unions should seek to change their

adversarial image and develop more co-operative relations with management (Angle and Perry, 1986; Sherer and Morishima, 1989; see also Bacon and Storey, 1996; Kelly, 1996). In contrast, the few studies that have occurred outside of the US do not seem to uphold such a claim. Guest and Dewe (1991) found little evidence of the effect of co-operative industrial relations on union or company commitment and indeed, found little evidence of 'dual commitment' at all. Deery et al's (1994) study in Australia found conversely that the industrial relations climate did have an impact upon 'dual commitment', but where the climate was perceived as positive, this did not lead to 'dual commitment' but to reduced union commitment. In other words, the employer and the union were seen as being in competition with each other for the commitment of workers. It has thus been argued that this lack of consensus suggests that the assumption that 'dual commitment' is necessary for a co-operative climate needs to be critically examined. With their scepticism of the usefulness of the 'dual commitment' concept as an independent variable, Gordon and Ladd (1990) posit that in terms of the success of labour-management relations, it may be environmental factors that are more important rather than the patterns of allegiance. Alternatively, perhaps it is the nature of the leadership of unions or of management that are the more salient determinants of the success of co-operative programs.

The concept of 'dual commitment' also forms part of the analysis of another recurrent theme in this thesis of the existence of 'them and us' attitudes. The question of whether employees can develop 'dual commitment' or that there is an inherent conflict of allegiance that forces an either-or choice, evokes ideas of 'them and us'. This links to the traditional UK industrial sociological literature looking at workers' 'images of society' (see Bulmer, 1978; Dennis, 1956). In line with the socio-psychological focus, the

definition of 'them and us' attitudes used by Kelly and Kelly (1991) involves both the perception of a clear division between managers and workers and a feeling of identification with one of these groups. Attached to such an attitude is often a belief that the groups have conflicting interests. The evidence so far however, has only added to the lack of consensus about the impact of the nature of the industrial relations climate on commitment to union or company in the 'dual commitment' literature. Kelly and Kelly (1991) see little evidence of an alteration in more general attitudes about union-management relations due to implementation of NIR schemes; explained largely by the way in which the schemes were implemented. These are all areas that are pertinent to the context of this research and pose interesting questions to be investigated. However, Guest et al (1993) also add to the debate about 'them and us' and 'dual commitment' by pointing out that the two-fold commitment to either union or company may only be an industrial caricature. There is a similar argument made with regard to the coal industry (Ackers and Payne, 1998). 'Them and us' attitudes can be seen as more wide ranging and Guest et al (1993) were able to identify six different social groups in the workplace they studied which employees identified with. It is one of the concerns of this thesis to unpack this concept of 'them and us', and more closely examine the pattern of relationships in the workplaces studied. This involves questions such as, do workers perceive there to be a 'them and us' situation and if so, what groups make up 'them' and 'us' in their view? Were there points over the whole time period when these identities and attachments differed and what are the possible reasons for these differences?

Summary

This section has explored the utility of the concept of 'dual commitment' and outlined the ways in which the concept is used within this thesis. It is not the objective to investigate the

nature of the individual variables or to develop new measures of 'dual commitment'. The concept is used as a way to analyse and attempt to understand the changing worker perceptions of the employment relationship. The interest and importance of taking a socio-psychological approach is highlighted in focusing on employee attitudes towards the union and companies. However, more importantly, and as will be discussed in detail throughout the findings in Chapter Four and as part of the conclusions in Chapter Five, the nature of the 'structured antagonisms' that form the employment relationship are underlined. In attempting to unpack and investigate the nature of these 'structured antagonisms', one of the factors influencing perceptions, was found to be the different managerial and union strategies and policies at the two firms, within their particular contexts. It is these themes and issues that are discussed in the following section, where the foregoing discussion about the nature of commitment and trust is linked to that of the nature of the terms of engagement between union and management at the two workplaces.

The Terms of Engagement between Union, Management and Employees

This section aims to extend the forgoing analysis of 'dual commitment' into further theoretical debates relevant to the thesis. The 'dual commitment' literature has highlighted the focus on employee perceptions of commitment and trust, which lie at the heart of this thesis ⁸. The last section outlined the utilisation of the concept of 'dual commitment' in this thesis, looking at how the nature of commitment and identities within the psychological contract can affect the impact of developments in the wider context on the workplace industrial relations climate, and issues of the effectiveness of the union organisation in mobilising membership participation and having an effective role in the workplace. These issues are now developed further. The discussion moves

onto the debate regarding the ways in which commitment and identity (or perceptions of) can be influenced by the terms of engagement between management and union. Bearing in mind the assumption that the union and management have to meet and interact within the employment relationship, the next section focuses on the debates around the impact of different union and management strategies on the way in which the union and management interact in the workplace, and the implications that the nature of this engagement has on perceptions of the employment relationship and levels of commitment and trust.

The Influence of Union Leadership

With regard to the nature of members' commitment to the union, a return is made to claims made in the section 'the wider context' in this chapter that an assessment of the impact of developments in the wider context must be grounded in the particular workplace context being studied. With respect to the unions, it is at the industry and workplace level that unions organise, sustain and renew themselves (c.f: Ackers et al, 1996). It follows therefore that changes in the wider context are mediated by the nature of specific workplace unionism. The extent to which unions are affected by wider changes depends on the nature of members' attitudes towards that specific union. The following discussion also extends the discussion of 'dual commitment' where it was established that levels of commitment, trust and identity are based around fulfilment of a psychological contract between individuals and representatives of the company or union. One key factor in meeting the expectations of employees in these terms, which emerges from this research, is the importance of the individual union leadership style.

⁸ Personal communication with Mike Terry, February 1999

The nature of the leadership style adopted by officials and representatives in positions of influence within the workplace union is important. Here, the term 'union leader' refers to the workplace union organisation, as distinct from the national union organisation, and primarily to the Convenors and shop stewards, as distinct from the lay membership or 'rank and file'. A specific focus on the role of union leaders is warranted, because of three major reasons as outlined by Barling et al (1992: 125). Firstly, a position as convenor or shop steward can be seen as the highest form of participation in a union and allows some involvement in the decision-making process of both the union organisation and company. Secondly, union leaders play a unique role in facilitating involvement of the rank and file membership. Thirdly, union leaders play a key role in union/management relations. The style and character of leadership can exert a critical influence on the way in which the union organisation is responsive to general membership aspirations and the way in which collective awareness and activism of the mass of workers is stimulated (Hyman, 1979; Barling et al, 1992). Fosh (1993) similarly identified that the different workplaces in her study had varying patterns of surges and troughs in membership participation. This has two consequences in terms of the discussion; firstly that commitment enacted through participation is not static but shifts depending on context, and secondly that those surges and troughs in participation were found to relate to leadership style. As Fosh argues: *"The careful choice of local leadership style can yield results even when members' expectations and situations are not the most favourable for the development of unionism"* (1993: 589). In other words, the leadership style can mediate the negative effects of external factors that appear to undermine the position of trade unions.

One area of leadership style that is highlighted is how participatory and collectivist the leader is (Fosh, 1993; Darlington, 1994; Fairbrother, 1989). A participatory style stresses the importance of communications, consultation and the involvement of members in decision-making. A collectivist outlook is where issues are seen by local leaders, as relating to a shared situation of work rather than as individual grievances. Fosh's (1993) research suggested that local leaders, by their ability to lead in a way that encourages members to become involved and see the collective implications of issues that arise, can build upon surges of membership participation and interest, thus increasing the strength of workplace unionism. A participatory and collectivist style of leadership brings into focus issues of union democracy in the workplace. This is measured in terms of representativeness (extent to which leaders' policies and perspectives demonstrate commitment to the interests which members express), accountability (the extent of consultation of and reporting back to membership and adherence to membership decisions), and involvement (the extent to which members are drawn into workplace decision-making) (Fosh and Heery, 1990).

The issue of leadership style involves questions of a difference between the interests of union leaders and 'rank and file' members. This discussion thus turns to one aspect of the possibility of complexities and tensions (structured antagonisms) within the relationship (or corner of the triangle: Chapter One) between the union representatives and members, which forms a clear part of the analysis in Chapters Four and Five regarding commitment to and effectiveness of the union. It is too simplistic a view to start from the assumption that officials and members have a limited number of shared interests (Fosh and Heery, 1990; Lane and Roberts, 1971). First, union leaders have an ongoing relationship with external parties and wish to preserve a stable bargaining

position. Secondly, they perform a specialist function and so have a tendency to define trade union purposes in a manner emphasising their own expertise. Finally, because they possess a direct responsibility for organisational security and survival they do not want to unduly antagonise employers (Hyman, 1979). (This last comment links to the particular place in labour negotiations held by union leaders; what Walton and McKersie (1965) call the 'boundary role', where union leaders have a role relationship with the other negotiator, and where the opponent in the negotiating situation becomes an ally in the maintenance of this relationship). These procedural issues (for example, stable bargaining relations and organisational interests) may be different to the short term interests of the rank and file, which may deal with more substantive issues (for example, wages, conditions, job security) (Darlington, 1994). These debates also include the development by which many workplace unions became increasingly bureaucratised and routinised during the 1970s (Hyman, 1979; Fairbrother, 1989; Terry, 1995). This development holds with it, the danger that the stronger and more professional a union's apparatus becomes, the greater the likelihood is of a disparity between the outlook of the leader and the rank and file (Lane and Roberts, 1971; Fairbrother, 1989). At both of the manufacturing plants that Fairbrother studied (1989), separation could be identified, not only between union leaders and rank and file, but also between the convenors/full time officials and shop stewards. Shop stewards were largely circumscribed to representing section members on a individual grievance basis and were excluded from debate about policy and negotiations. Similarly, the senior leadership body acted without reference to the membership. The scenario which thus evolved was that the union leadership came to accept the company's definition of the requirements for the long term future of the company, even when the product market was buoyant and should have yielded more bargaining power for employees. The terrain of issues bargained over by the union, was

increasingly defined by the company. The recommendations for improvement within these workplace union organisations focused around issues of participatory and collectivist leadership style and an emphasis on the workings of union democracy in the workplace. A qualification to this argument of separation between leaders and rank and file is that while leaders retain a degree of autonomy from the rank and file, the very existence of this lay membership ensures that the leadership of the union does not become isolated. Lay members can play a vital role in defining both substantive issues relevant to the union, and the styles of behaviour that union representatives can adopt (Beynon, 1973; Darlington, 1994; Batstone et al, 1977). In other words, the relationship between union leaders and rank and file is perhaps best seen as a two way process, where the lay membership are considered as an important constraint on leader activity.

Another approach is to see the separation of interests or viewpoints between union leaders and rank and file as a positive aspect of the workings of unionism in the workplace. Here, this thesis shares an emphasis placed on individual leadership styles (Barling et al, 1992: 136) rather than on structural factors. A great deal of research on union leadership has been given over to the development of typologies attempting to categorise leader behaviour (Gouldner, 1947; Batstone et al, 1977; Marchington, 1973). The typology developed by Batstone et al (1977), while facing criticism (see Pedler, 1973), is still regarded as valid in many discussions and does provide a useful tool for investigating individual leadership styles. Batstone et al (1977) identified two types of union leaders in their study. The 'delegate' has the mandate by members to do no more than carry out their wishes. Fletcher (1972) sees the fundamental basis for union democracy as resting with the attitudes of members and so feels that the union leader should be a 'delegate'; what he terms a 'servant of the membership'. The alternative

view is that the union leader can be a 'representative', where a leadership role is adopted, and policies are not only executed according to the wishes of membership, but initiatives are taken and policies autonomously. Those leaders who took the 'representative' role were considered to be more successful in Batstone et al's study on the grounds of criteria including:- the level of membership approaches, the level of autonomy of the leaders from management and from the national union organisation, the production of 'recipes for action' against management, the control of mass meetings, and the existence of a 'strong bargaining relationship' (discussed below). On two dimensions of power, the initiation of issues and their control in procedural terms, and the maintenance of an ideology and set of institutions in the workplace, it was those 'representative' leaders who were more demonstrably effective. This links to a longer-term, strategic role of the union representative, fitting in with critiques of rank and file militancy (Hobsbawm, 1981). In this view, while leaders should encourage the participation of rank and file, and should have a collectivist outlook, they should not just be 'servants of the membership', but need to take on a leadership role over the rank and file, to be successful. This links to the issue of the psychological contract discussed earlier, where it is seen as critical for unions to ensure that the members are intentionally given reasonable expectations of what they might expect if they stay employed at any particular company, and to meet 'their end' of this contract with regard to the expectations of their members (Barling et al, 1992: 67). Thus a discussion of the implications of the leadership style of the union representatives in the two lock companies forms part of the analysis explaining the findings discussed in Chapter Four. Chapter Five links leadership style to both an assessment of the way in which union and management interact, and the implication of the nature of this interaction to employee perceptions of the employment relationship and their commitment, trust and identity. It

is also linked to the way in which a particular leadership style, within a given context can mediate the negative effects of external factors and explain some of the continuity in attitudes and perceptions across the period at LockCo.

Dichotomy of Conflict and Co-operation and the Incorporation Debate

The power for unions to be adversarial has perhaps declined over the period, constrained by the restrictive Thatcherite legislation and the high levels of unemployment. In what way is this important to the attitudes and commitment of employees? The debate seems to be polarised around whether or not unions should be aiming to highlight the shared interests that exist between management and union rather than basing relations on adversarialism (Darlington, 1994; Kelly, 1996). This debate challenges traditional labels attached to union/management relations.

The discussion about the separation between leaders and rank and file also involves issues of incorporation. Incorporation can be seen as the process by which the world-views of union leaders, are transformed to that of management (Black and McCabe, 1998; Rollinson, 1991). In terms of attitude, this involves a situation where representatives of the union *“become more favourably disposed to those who they nominally oppose and at the same time become less favourably disposed towards those that they represent”* (Rollinson, 1991: 82). In terms of action, where union leaders choose to opt for management strategies that undermine employee interests, this can be considered to be evidence of incorporation. The question is then whether attitudinal change leads to incorporation in the form of action. Rollinson (1991) did not find any evidence to suggest that incorporation had occurred because there was no clear pay-off for such behaviour. Similarly, WIRS3 findings (Millward et al, 1992) also indicate little evidence for the incorporation of union ‘elites’ although they do indicate that a greater

potential for incorporated unions may exist in the 'new' climate surrounding British trade unionism (Bassett, 1986). Again, the litmus test resides at the workplace level and highlights the need for in-depth case study research.

One can go further however, and unpack the premises on which theories of incorporation are based. This reflects disenchantment with the simplistic model of the conflict relationship between capital and labour (Black and McCabe, 1996; Edwards, 1995; Ackers and Black, 1992; Terry, 1983; Cressey and McInnes, 1980). A view that finds incorporation to be the inevitable product of co-operative relations, is based on a simplistic view of the role of union representatives which places them in strict opposition to management. This neglects how union leaders are engaged in a contradictory relationship with management that comprises different roles involving both resistance and accommodation (Fox, 1985: 440; Edwards and Heery, 1985; Black and McCabe, 1998; Darlington, 1994; Ackers and Black, 1992;). Union representatives understand their role as arbiters between workers and management but theirs is not necessarily a neutral stance (Ackers and Black, 1992). This relates to a sense of 'ambivalent consciousness' (Parkin, 1971) in reference to certain shared interests with management while also remaining in fundamental opposition to them. Most union leaders adopt complex and shifting frames of reference depending on the issue. It is plausible to suggest that workers and managers may share common interests in the immediate survival of firms, something which has increased in importance over the period and so there may indeed be an awareness of at least "*temporarily convergent objectives*" (Terry, 1986: 177). This thesis builds on this debate, exploring how the employment relationship can be characterised as much by co-operation as it is by conflict. Thus, a link is made again to the 'dual commitment' debate discussed earlier in this chapter,

where the underlying notion of 'dual commitment' emphasised the problematic and complex nature of commitment, trust and identities to social groups within the employment relationship. This is discussed in depth in Chapter Five.

The idea that there are certain accepted understandings that embody the bargaining relationship is relevant here. There is an extensive literature on the rituals and procedures of bargaining, of which the most classic is Walton and McKersie's (1965) *A Behavioural Theory of Labour Negotiations*. Such a discussion is relevant to this thesis as a major section of the analysis presented in Chapter Five focuses on the way in which the individual union leaders interact with management and how this relates to, and shapes, employee expectations of that interaction. Of the four sub-processes outlined by Walton and McKersie⁹, Attitudinal Structuring and Intra-Organisational Bargaining are the most relevant to the areas of inquiry in this thesis, focusing on the socio-emotional interpersonal processes involved in negotiating situations. An overly extended discussion is not relevant here (as this is not an exploration of the relevance or utility of their theory). However, the ideas developed with regard to these two sub-processes are based on similar conceptions of the bargaining relationship to this thesis. In particular, the importance of attitudes and relationship patterns in the nature of labour negotiations, and a recognition of possible conflict between negotiators (union leaders or managers) and their wider organisational groupings. There is also a shared emphasis on the important role played by the union leader (one of the chief negotiators in Walton and McKersie's terms), in defining the terms of any labour negotiation (terms of engagement between management and union in the terms of this thesis) through the interaction of objectives and expectations between the union leader/manager and the employees/management personnel. In this, the positive

⁹ The other two sub-processes, involve discussion around problems and objectives of the joint decision-making process, namely, Distributive Bargaining and Integrative Bargaining (See Walton and McKersie, 1965: 4).

consequences of an emphasis on the workings of internal democracy and mechanisms of communication discussed earlier, in reference to the research of Fosh (1993) and Fairbrother (1989), are also found in Walton and McKersie's (1965) analysis and link the different research studies together in the context of this thesis. The procedures of the eight tactical assignments designed to change the 'attitudinal structuring' of labour negotiations, revolve primarily around improved communication, transparency and involvement of members.

What is also relevant within the analytical themes developed within this thesis is that Walton and McKersie's (1965), exposition of the set of understandings which embody the bargaining (employment) relationship link to dramaturgical conceptions of social relations. Views that there are certain accepted understandings about forms of interaction can be seen as involving the existence of certain roles, within certain contexts, with certain vocabularies demanding certain behaviours, akin to the workings of a scripted play. A dramaturgical perspective on social action concerns how people (defined as social 'actors'), use impression management behaviours to create and maintain identities. Impression management (in a broad definition) is seen as part of an everyday process of socially 'constructing' reality (Gardner and Avolio, 1998). This is drawn essentially from the work of Erving Goffman (1959), *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, where people are seen as 'actors' engaging in 'performances', in certain 'settings' for a particular 'audience'. Use of dramatic terminology, notably, 'framing', 'scripting', 'staging' and 'performing' constitutes the phases of this dramaturgical process (Gardner and Avolio, 1998: 32). This forms part of the analysis in Chapter Five, focusing on the existence of a "drama of negotiation".

An emphasis is placed on the interaction between actors, so that the meaning of people's action is found in the manner in which they express themselves within a context of that interaction with other similarly expressive people (Brissett and Edgeley, 1990). This highlights the existence of a two-way dramaturgical process, where leaders and followers, or subordinates jointly construct their identities and establish boundaries on appropriate behaviour and action, in terms of the dramaturgical vocabulary, the 'role' or 'part' that the leader should play. In the context of particular leaders in the workplace (whether that be union or management), this links to the idea of the psychological contract (discussed earlier) and the ways in which particular expectations about the role of the union and management can influence perceptions and attitudes of commitment and trust. The importance of leaders picking up on 'signals' emanating from the 'audience' or followers is thus important, and forms part of the analysis in Chapter Five linked to the 'drama of negotiation', and to the influence of union leadership style in encouraging internal democracy, which might better allow the 'picking up' of those signals. Thus the idea of this two-way process is brought out very clearly in the findings of this thesis, where contextualised employee expectations were found to influence perceptions and attitudes towards both union and management, and consequently levels of trust and commitment. The objective in using a dramaturgical perspective is not in developing new models of impression management (for a review of current research around these issues see Gardner and Avolio, 1998), but as a way of analysing the importance of leadership and management styles in influencing perceptions of commitment and trust. Such a perspective also fits in with the methodological approach of this thesis based around a qualified semiological and ethno-methodological epistemology (discussed in depth in Chapter Three).

The foregoing discussion emphasises the 'structured antagonisms', and the mixture of conflict and co-operation which is perceived to characterise the employment relationship.

Union leaders and representatives thus have to make a realistic assessment of the alternatives available to them, and management and union will usually have a long tradition of working together. The involvement of the trade unionist with management processes does not necessarily have to be seen as resulting in an inability to either frame or organise resistance. This approach offers a more positive outlook for the ideas of 'Social Partnership' currently espoused by the TUC and a number of British unions (Ackers and Payne, 1998, 1996; Payne and Ackers, 1998). There are various models of 'Social Partnership' from the 'pluralist-voluntarist' stance, to a German model of partnership as 'industrial democracy' (Ackers and Payne, 1996: 5). However, that promoted by the TUC as a major tenet of its renewal strategy (within the British context of union derision) has involved a firmly pluralist and collectivist approach, linked to better employment rights, issues of industrial democracy, and the need for a closer, more constructive relationship with management. John Monks echoes the calls for a more co-operative view of industrial relations, *'an IR system can be rooted in a search for compromise. It means institutions that are designed to generate agreement rather than resolve conflict'* (quoted in Taylor, 1994, xvi). In parallel, commentators have noted that there is evidence that a bloc of 'progressive' employers in Britain are now coming to accept a shared agenda with partnership-oriented trade unions (Ackers and Payne, 1998; Storey et al, 1993; Storey and Sisson, 1994). Rather than anything new, or something incompatible with the historical traditions of British industrial relations, there is a convincing debate which sees the new rhetoric of 'Social Partnership' as linking to a pragmatic, moderate tradition of British trade unions, particularly in industries such as locks, food and footwear (Payne and Ackers, 1998; Goodman et al, 1977, Smith et al, 1990) and evidence of substantive collaborative traditions even in mining, seen as one of the most militant of industries (Ackers and Payne, 1997).

Connected to this is the older idea of a 'strong bargaining relationship' between union and management, originally discussed by Brown (1972) and reinvigorated by Batstone et al (1977). This involves the development of a relationship between union leader and manager that goes beyond the minimum formal relationship. Negotiating becomes particularistic and affectively positive, confidential information is exchanged, 'off the record' discussions occur, and each party is, to an extent, concerned with protecting the relationship and therefore the position of the other party. This links again to Walton and McKersie's (1965) view of the 'boundary role' played by union leaders as noted above. This rests upon a broad balance of power between the two parties, a relationship of trust and a large risk investment. This may be seen to hold characteristics of a simplistic view of incorporation because the basic opposition of interests is mediated by a personal relationship of co-operation. However, this 'strong bargaining relationship' also facilitates the constructive resolution of problems and therefore, brings benefits to the membership. Batstone et al (1977) found a 'strong bargaining relationship' to be a component of the success of the union in the workplace; leading to the union holding a central institutional position in the organisation, and therefore encouraging membership commitment to the union. Collective bargaining can generate common interests between the union and management based on the survival and growth of the enterprise, which need not deny the structural conflict of interests between management and labour. The interest in this research is to explore the terms of engagement between the union and management at the lock companies; how they have changed or remained stable over the period and how this has impacted upon the views, opinions and attitudes of employees and vice versa. Ideas of social partnership (as discussed earlier) have some common themes with ideas of 'dual commitment'. To highlight the relevance of these debates to the analysis of this research, what is drawn out in Chapter Five, in the analysis of the

findings, is an exploration of the challenge that such themes of 'dual commitment' and social partnership pose to the 'structured antagonisms' that exist in the lock workplaces. What emerges is the idea that the adoption of ideas of social partnership is not a clear cut decision and can have all sorts of implications for employee commitment and identity as the comparison between LockCo and KeyCo brings out.

Bearing in mind the emphasis within this research on frames of reference, situated vocabularies and views and orientations of shopfloor workers, there are clear linkages that can be made to the sociological literature concerned with determining the different images of society held by the working class (Bulmer, 1975, Lockwood, 1958, Willis, 1977). These draw out particular images that one may expect to find in different occupational communities. The aspects of social consciousness and images of society that relate specifically to relations between employees and employers are particularly pertinent to this research. Drawing on Lockwood (1958, 1966) the postulation is that different types of worker can be identified and that the work and community relations by which they are differentiated may also generate different forms of social consciousness. While Lockwood's (1966, 1975) typology of workers can be criticised for being too simplistic and under-estimating the heterogeneous nature of the working class (Bulmer, 1975), it is a useful tool for framing analysis and situating debate. Lockwood's typology identified two different types of worker; firstly, the traditional worker which could be divided to include the most radical and class conscious segment of the working class in the 'proletarian' worker, and the most socially acquiescent and conservative elements in the 'deferential' worker. In comparison stood the 'privatised' worker (1975: 17). For this thesis, the traditional worker type is most relevant because of the fit between the context characteristic to the traditional worker and the lock companies. Both types of

charting the changing character of the specific contexts in which the employment relationships occur and the ways in which these relationships have evolved with, responded to and mediated the wider environmental context. Issues and themes which have been prioritised in the analysis are; the salience of union membership, the centrality of the union role in the workplace and the impact of new managerial styles and strategies, as influences on levels of employee commitment and identity to unions and organisations (new collectivism: Bacon and Storey, 1996). These are all areas where some change has been anticipated in the wider British industrial relations context and where the local contexts provide a testing ground.

This chapter has also presented the debates which are key to an understanding of the nature of the employment relationship at workplace level, and which have been used as a framework for analysis. Firstly, a need to unpack and investigate employee perceptions of the nature of commitment and identity within the employment relationship. Here, 'dual commitment' is used in this thesis, (in comparison to the way in which it has commonly been used) as a concept which draws us to a view of the alliances within the employment relationship as complex and problematic. It is important to attempt to chart the shifting frames of reference of employees with regard to this, where ambiguous and contradictory views and opinions may co-exist, reflecting the 'structured antagonisms' which form part of employees' perceptions and expectations, and which this thesis draws out of the analysis of findings in Chapter Five. There are two main areas of influence on these perceptions. Firstly, drawing on the literature of social imagery and frames of reference, employees' perceptions are seen as grounded in their past experiences and their assessment of the current context in the light of those past experiences. This lends weight to the longitudinal methodology of this study. Secondly, a need to look at the

different managerial and union strategies, across the period at LockCo and between the two companies in the comparison with KeyCo, as influencing employee perceptions of the employment relationship and levels of commitment and identity. Such themes are drawn out of the literature presented on trade union organisation, the relationship between full time officials and local activists, typologies of shop steward activity, bargaining and negotiating relationships; all of which are seen as influencing the way in which the union and management engage/interact in the workplace. Here, the discussion of literatures presenting different typologies of and themes around union leadership, is not there in order for the findings of this thesis to directly test the utility of such typologies or develop new ones. It is there to situate the debates and to contextualise the questions and issues. This involves; where the role of the union leader is seen as important and why it is seen as important, as this is an issue that is brought out clearly in the analysis of the findings in Chapter Five.

Finally, the discussion as part of the Literature Review begins to offer up suggestions as to the appropriate methodology for this research. Indeed, the diverse and wide-ranging sources of literature which this thesis draws upon also means that there are diverse and wide-ranging methodological approaches taken by the various authors. In some respects, this variety is reduced somewhat by the identification of key areas of inquiry which will be summarised in the section below. However, the variety of methodological approaches is also reflected in the ontological and epistemological position drawn upon in this thesis, of 'methodological pluralism', which informs the particular approach taken during the fieldwork and analysis of this thesis which is discussed in detail in the next chapter.

Specific Areas of Inquiry

The foregoing analysis thus establishes the theoretical debates and positions that are relevant to this thesis. The thesis offers a broad, exploratory ethnographic framework on industrial relations and working life at the case companies. It is useful here however, as a summary, to outline the broad framework of issues and areas of inquiry, which informed the fieldwork. This will be of particular use for the next chapter in assessing how the methods chosen were related to the questions raised. Table 1 below is a representation of the general areas of interest which emerge from the Literature Review, and the way in which some areas are prioritised and focused to provide specific areas of inquiry. For clarity, this also highlights what the thesis *does not* attempt to do in exploring a particular theme or issue. It should be noted that there are many overlapping connections between the various sections and constant links can be made between areas of inquiry.

General Areas of Interest	Specific Areas of Inquiry
<p>Local Context</p> <p>1) Tradition of a paternalistic management style and its implications for current employee perceptions of the employment relationship.</p> <p>2) Existence of a long established traditional occupational community</p> <p>3) Impact of new managerial strategies at KeyCo.</p> <p>4) Impact of new work organisation at KeyCo.</p> <p>5) Effectiveness of small trade unions in the face of trade union strategies of merger.</p>	<p>1-4) These areas are investigated only insofar as they contribute to an attempt to explain and understand the changing nature of perceptions of the employment relationship, the impact of the gradual dismantling of a paternalistic management style at LockCo and the impact of different managerial strategies between LockCo and KeyCo are explored.</p> <p>2) Do not investigate differing conceptions of 'occupational community' in terms of (Reference). It is seen as simply referring to a local community based around an industry with particular historical and sociological traditions.</p> <p>3, 4) Do not look at the wider implications of change in work organisation such as the impact of flexibility on motivation, productivity, worker visibility etc.</p> <p>5) Exploration of small trade unions is out of the remit of this thesis¹⁰.</p>
<p>Wider Context</p> <p>1) Thatcherite project re: trade unions</p> <p>2) Legislation</p> <p>3) Marginalisation of shop stewards</p> <p>4) Declining salience of collectivism and salience of trade unions</p> <p>5) HRM and new managerial techniques</p> <p>6) Flexibility</p> <p>7) Resegmentation of labour markets</p>	<p>There are too many issues to deal with in this thesis. Issues which have been highlighted as important involve the extent to which developments in the wider environment, (particularly the implications of the Thatcherite project regarding trade unions and new managerial techniques) have impacted upon the salience and centrality of the union and of collectivist attitudes in the two workplaces..</p>
<p>Dual Commitment</p> <p>1) Methodological and conceptual weakness of existing research.</p> <p>2) Investigation of whether 'dual commitment' exists or if there is a trade off between union and company commitment.</p> <p>3) Antecedents of company and union commitment</p> <p>4) Implications of company and union commitment.</p> <p>5) Investigation of whether 'dual commitment' is an independent or dependent variable.</p> <p>6) Psychological Contract as a factor in commitment to company or union.</p> <p>7) Investigation of the industrial relations climate as a factor on existence of 'dual commitment'.</p>	<p>1) This thesis does not attempt to develop a new methodology for the study of 'dual commitment'. What this thesis investigates is what employee perceptions are of levels of commitment and trust, both over time and in response to changed managerial structures and strategies. Methodologically, this emphasises a need to have a more qualitative approach and recognise the problematic notion of 'dual commitment' within a framework of structured antagonisms.</p> <p>2-5) These elements are not discussed in this thesis in any rigorous way and it is not the objective of this thesis to develop new or to directly test existing measures of 'dual commitment'. The trade off issue is explored insofar as the changed managerial style at LockCo, and new strategies and changed work organisation at KeyCo, impact upon employee perceptions of the employment relationship and levels of commitment and trust.</p> <p>6) The notion of the psychological contract is explored as a way of making sense of employee perceptions, in terms of how their expectations are formed and influence their sense-making process of the current situation. Here the social imagery literature focuses on what frames the world view, and how perceptions may be explained</p> <p>7) Not explored directly as it has been in the 'dual commitment' literature. However, issues of strategies of union/management engagement in terms of co-operation or adversarialism are explored in terms of what is considered to be appropriate interaction in the perceptions of employees.</p>

¹⁰ See publication on this issue in Black, J., Greene, A.M., and Ackers, P. (1997)

8) Frames of reference and social imagery 9) Issues of social identity: 'them and us'.	8, 9) There is not an attempt to explore working class imagery in the way in which Bulmer and Lockwood did. Aspects of their debates are taken on as forming part of the area investigating commitment and trust to the parties to the employment relationship, investigating the complexity and problematic nature of identities to social groups. This is linked to the idea of 'structured antagonisms'.
Terms of engagement 1) Union leadership style and implications 2) Union Democracy 3) Relationship between full time officials and local activists and rank and file. 4) Typologies of shops steward activity 5) Nature of employment relationship. Incorporation and issues of conflict. Drama of negotiation. 6) Strategies for engagement between union and management.	1) Is explored insofar as this is seen as a major influencing factor on the maintenance and nature of commitment to the union and the way in which the employment relationship is perceived. Relates to the exploration of the psychological contract in terms of expectations of the role of the union in the employment relationship. 2) Again forms part of the discussion of the way in which members' expectations about the role of the union in the workplace are fulfilled or not. Relates to the psychological contract and the nature of union commitment. 3, 4) These two areas are explored insofar as they relate to union leadership style and the fulfilment of employee expectations as an influence on union commitment and perceptions of the employment relationship. There is no formal attempt to establish new types of shop steward activity or develop theory about the relationships within formal union structures. 5, 6) These two areas are related in their enquiry. Views of the employment relationship are seen to relate to expectations of the psychological contract discussed above with regard to what employees perceive as appropriate interaction between union and management. This relates to an investigation of what is seen as appropriate roles/behaviour within the "drama of negotiation" which characterises the employment relationship and relates to 'structured antagonisms'

Table 1: Areas of Inquiry Emerging from the Literature Review

The over-riding subject interest of this thesis is an aim to chart the changing character of the employment relationship, involving workers, the trade union and managers situated firmly within particular workplace contexts. It is primarily through the shopfloor workers' perceptions, attitudes, vocabulary and rhetoric, that this analysis will be viewed. The four broad areas of inquiry are presented below.

A) Placing the analysis within the specific workplace contexts, one objective of the research is to look at the implications for employee perceptions of relations within the workplace and of levels of commitment and trust, when a traditional paternalist approach

to management is gradually dismantled¹¹, drawing on the longitudinal comparison at LockCo. Secondly, to investigate what the implications are for the same perceptions, when there is significant change within the managerial structure and strategy, drawing on the comparison between LockCo and KeyCo.

B) To investigate the ways in which these relationships have evolved with, responded to and mediated by, the wider environmental context. In particular, there is a focus on looking at how salient and central trade unions, trade union membership, and collective attitudes are perceived to be, (seen as possible influences on levels of commitment and trust to union and company). Here, some comparison can be made with macro surveys and literature debating the extent of change in British industrial relations since 1979 at workplace level.

C) An attempt to understand what informs the workers' perceptions of commitment and trust to the union and company. This also involves a consideration of what this indicates about the utility of the concept of 'dual commitment' in helping to understand and analyse the changing perceptions of the employment relationship. This concerns what the findings indicate about the nature of perceptions of commitment, identity and trust over time, and in response to changed managerial strategies and structures. This is linked to the previous section for example, how do changed strategies affect collectivist attitudes or participation in the workplace?

D) This brings in questions about the psychological contract and the role of context and experiences, both past, and present, assessed in reference to the past, in informing workers' perceptions. Thus, what is seen as appropriate engagement/interaction between

¹¹ Personal Communication with Mike Terry, February 1999.

management and union, both over time and in response to changed structures and strategies? This fits in with an idea of a “drama of negotiation”, with another objective being to understand what is seen by workers, as appropriate action and interaction by the actors (union leaders, managers, employees) within that drama. Finally, linking back to ideas of commitment and trust which lie at the heart of this thesis, how can actors within the employment relationship be effective and maintain worker commitment and trust within this ‘drama of negotiation’?

The next chapter goes on to outline the methodology of the fieldwork and analysis.

Chapter Three. Methodology

Introduction

In brief, the methodology of the core research was a qualitative, interview-based, case study, which was conducted within a broad ethnographic paradigm. Periods of observation, conversations and meetings, plus a variety of documentary evidence were also used to support the interviews. As a complement to this longitudinal research, and in order to provide cross comparison across the industrial sector, a second study was completed within the same remit at a neighbouring lock company.

This chapter articulates the reasoning and epistemology of my research. It begins by presenting how the particular methods chosen are related to the specific areas of inquiry outlined at the end of the last chapter. It indicates how the choice of methodology was guided and limited by the longitudinal nature of the research and the main ontological concerns of the thesis. It also aims to pre-empt possible criticisms of the methodological pluralism adopted and demonstrates how this research can fit into a broad ethnographic paradigm. The specific procedures of fieldwork and analysis are then presented, tracing the project from the stage of 'setting up' to the stage of content analysis. It outlines how the group of interviewees at LockCo was chosen and the use of past interview transcripts. It also details the comparative study at KeyCo. The core technique of interviews is discussed, presenting the interview agendas used, how the interviews were conducted and how they were analysed. Finally it presents the supplementary sources of information which were available. The last section pulls together the foregoing discussion of components of the methodology in order to illustrate the overall strengths

of the methods chosen. It involves a detailed discussion and reflexive account of the ethical issues involved in this research and how the account can be seen as authentic.

The paradigm and methods chosen

Firstly, in recognition of the fact that this is longitudinal research and that it builds upon a number of studies across the period, past methodologies needed to be incorporated to allow longitudinal comparison of data. The previous studies had been driven by a qualitative, semi-structured interview methodology. This research project has thus been entered with a 'ready-made' framework of issues to investigate and with an existing interview design. Thus, a grounded theory or unstructured approach was inappropriate. This framework has not proved restrictive however, with the past work covering a wide range of issues. Secondly, it has been important to maintain a qualitative focus, which meets the requirement to build upon previous studies and also reflects that my research has the same concern for richness of data. The objective of the past studies was to "*let the respondents talk*" (Ackers and Black, 1992), and this was a similar concern in this thesis.

This is a longitudinal industrial relations study, which, with its emphasis on the plant-level context, meets the call for, and shares the concerns of, Terry and Edwards (1988), for more studies at the level of individual plant or company, to complement the broader historical accounts which emphasise patterns across whole industries. The subject matter and research questions also encourage a qualitative approach. In dealing primarily with attitudinal data, Fosh (1993) emphasised the need to use an informal and qualitative approach in the study of attitudes by the use of in-depth interviews. This provides a rounded picture of a dynamic situation. A qualitative study provides more opportunities to explore the strength of, and reasons behind a certain attitude that may not be apparent

from survey answers. Morris and Wood (1991) argue in a similar way in their comparison of survey and interview methods of research into the level of work place industrial relations change. Here, the in-depth interview provided a more rounded picture because the researcher could probe more deeply and ask questions about why certain responses were given, rather than accepting them at face value.

In addition, the diverse sources of literature and research that inform this thesis, discussed in the previous chapter, are used in a way that encourages a qualitative but methodologically pluralist approach (discussed in detail later). Each literature uses different methodological approaches. For example, the 'dual commitment' and organisational commitment literature implies a focus on employee attitudes, with much of the existing research based around psychological, quantitative studies. The literature on union leadership and bargaining relationships implies a focus on structures as well as attitudes, as does the literature with regard to paternalism, although with a historical analysis built in. The "drama of negotiation" debate has an attitudinal focus, but also links to a study of structure and process. Finally, the set of arguments concerning workers' social imagery and frames of reference, returns to employee attitudes and perceptions, but also takes in aspects of discourse analysis¹². However, the choice of methodological approach in this thesis, is guided by the way in which these diverse literatures are filtered, prioritised and pulled together, to form specific areas of inquiry as outlined at the end of Chapter Two. Certain methodological approaches can be rejected therefore, for example the factor analysis, psychological measure testing, quantitative format of many of the existing 'dual commitment' studies. As noted earlier, I am not using the concept in order to test or develop new measures and so am able to

¹² Informed by personal communication with Mike Terry, February, 1999.

analyse the relevant questions in a much more qualitative way. Most of the literatures share a common focus on attitudes and structures. Attitudes could have been gathered through a quantitative questionnaire, however, this would not be appropriate to the longitudinal context of the research project. As discussed above, it would have allowed the ability to probe, and gain a more rounded understanding of a dynamic situation. A qualitative approach, which is also methodologically pluralist, making use of a wide variety of sources of information, is more suited to an investigation of the areas of inquiry set out in Chapter Two. My concern has not been to rigorously test any one part of the diverse literature which has informed the thesis, but to gain the richest understanding possible of the perceptions of workers in the two lock companies. The methodological approach used in this thesis has allowed a focus on attitudes and process, a focus on the interviews has allowed some discursive analysis, and more information about structures and wider power, institutional, and social relationships, are provided by surrounding this interview evidence with information from many other sources. The procedures of this methodological pluralism and the surrounding sources of information are outlined in the rest of this chapter.

This research is broadly ethnographic and emphasises an ethnographic concern to allow the voices of those who have been researched to be heard, so that the account presented is as authentic as it can be (See later discussion). As Morgan and Smircich (1980: 493) point out, it is important to establish assumptions regarding ontology because they pose questions about epistemology. The different world views that the positions reflect, imply different grounds for knowledge about the social world and lead to different methodological approaches in the acquisition of that knowledge. There are various models within organisation theory that could be used in this research. The functionalist

trend (see Etzioni, 1961) which establishes that the ultimate justification for research goals lies in their contribution to a specific theory, has not been followed here. Instead, a more critical and interpretative approach is preferred, which sees as its ultimate aim, an increased understanding of the social worlds, within the workplaces which I am hoping to uncover. The main interest is in exploring more closely, the dynamics of the employment relationship and trying to investigate the social relations of work related to particular contexts (Related to specific area of inquiry A and C), looking at how people create and legitimate their worlds. This fits in with a perspective that recognises the 'symbolic realism' of social life (Harvey-Brown 1987), which postulates that people are creators of their own worlds. The question is how to get underneath these 'creations' of the world in particular contexts.

For this reason, there is an empathy with a qualified ethnomethodological and semiological viewpoint (Garfinkel 1967; Sacks 1963) which adopts a view of the social construction of reality. This connects to an interest in situated vocabularies (Wright-Mills 1947, 1940). Recent use of vocabularies of motive has been made, to study the processes of the employment relationship and provide a way of focusing in on the way that managers, unionists and workers legitimate certain actions and attitudes (Webb, 1996). This also links to industrial sociology, where there has been a concern to study: "*the frame of reference within which the actor's own definitions of the situations in which they are engaged are taken as an initial basis for the explanation of their social behaviour and relations*" (Goldthorpe et al, 1968: 184). One of the interests in this thesis is largely in trying to understand those frames of reference or world views of workers on the shopfloor. The concern is in investigating this process of accounting: how do people express and legitimate their social world? (Relates to specific areas of inquiry C and D)

This reinforces the emphasis of the methodology on the interviews and discussions as the means of data collection.

The stress here is on the importance of not only looking at *what* is said, but *how* it is said. The words that people use can be of considerable analytic importance, yielding valuable information about the way people organise their perceptions of the world. This places a further emphasis on the importance of context and the need for an in-depth case study approach. To understand people's actions therefore, the researcher has to look for the meaning attributed to those actions by the actors themselves. An approach that is based around the meanings and understandings of the actors involved is perhaps the most important way to 'get a grip' on the social world which is being investigated. We cannot study analytical concepts, value systems or ideologies in any direct way (Czarniawska-Jeorges, 1992). The researcher has to rely on the spoken interpretations of those people involved and then try and use external concepts, value systems and ideologies to help interpret them. However, here, what people say, and their interpretations of their world at work, is set firmly within the workplace context where I am able to triangulate with other sources of information, such as observation, facts, events and documentary evidence. The focus on discourse however, follows Webb (1996: 252), who maintains the dualism between language and practice, so that the accounts given can be seen as valid material in the interpretation of events and workplace relations. They are not just factual statements but representations of a particular world-view.

Harre (1981), argues that perhaps the only way in which to attempt this kind of organisational research is to apply a methodology which assembles members' understandings and interpretations of the situation, organisation and events and negotiates this with an outside observer's ethnography. The ideal approach is therefore an

ethnographic one. However, ethnography is not an easy methodology to circumscribe. There appears to be considerable diversity in the prescription and practice of what is considered to be ethnography. Indeed in his discussion of the roots and development of ethnography, Linstead states, "*the term 'ethnography' covers a diversity of positions, at the level of technique, methodology, or epistemology*" (1993: 100). However, there does appear to be some shared view of the characteristics of ethnography among methodological inquirers (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983; Fetterman, 1989; Potter, 1996; Potter & Wetherell, 1987). A process of literature review, peer discussion and conference debate has indicated that the word ethnography has an 'ideological' value for some, that brings with it a range of methodological practices and techniques that are deemed as being appropriate to 'classical', 'pure' or 'true' ethnography. As Czarniawska-Jeorges points out, "*The question is whether if we embrace a methodology, we then have to embrace the ideology or lack of one that lies behind it*" (1992: 25). It is therefore important to establish why an ethnographic paradigm, (as it is defined below) is appropriate to this thesis.

Looking at 'ethnography' in purely etymological terms, this research project falls into its ambit. The word ethnography means the art and science of describing a group or culture. More generally too, the content of the research project appears to match what ethnographers such as Fetterman (1989), see as being part of a typical ethnography including the history of the group, the geography of location, kinship patterns symbols, politics, economic systems, educational and socialisation systems and the degree of contact between target culture and main stream culture. However, while the literature indicates some shared understandings of the techniques involved with ethnography, there are differences in the prescription of these techniques. Most notably, in classic

anthropological terms, the main technique involves participant observation as a method. Hammersley and Atkinson characterise ethnographic participation as: *"The ethnographer participates overtly or covertly in people's daily lives for an extended period of time; watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions, collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issue with which he or she is concerned"* (1983: 3). An assessment of the methods used for this thesis indicates that there are 'versions' of ethnography which involve levels of involvement beyond that which is involved in my research (Czarniawska-Jeorges, 1992; Fetterman, 1989). However, certain factors about this study meet the conditions of ethnographic participation and share its strengths in terms of being able to get an in-depth picture of a social situation. Firstly, the total fieldwork stretched across a period of around three years, and I was able to achieve a degree of familiarity with the people and the overall setting. In addition, and perhaps most importantly, many different types of data were collected through a variety of different methods including formal interviews, informal chats and observation at key and routine meetings and gatherings. There are some limitations to my ethnographic participation, in that I did not 'work on the line' as a participant observer and involvement with the participants was mainly in pre-arranged interview settings. In addition, observation at meetings and gatherings was largely by invitation of the 'gate keepers'. However, a purist view of ethnography appears to be particularly narrow and constricted. The practical contingencies of fieldwork mean that a 'full-blown', classical ethnography is often impossible. There are also doubts about whether participant observation is either the only, or the best way to do ethnography. Czarniawska-Jeorges (1992) comments that the ability to be a participant observer is limited to the extent that a lucky access situation exists or the study is in a work place that does not require particular qualifications. In addition, this kind of participation requires a time context

that is quite impractical in most cases. As Czarniawska-Jeorges (1992) points out, there are many other ways to immerse oneself in a culture such as; non-participant observation, observant participation ¹³ and through ethnographic interviews. For these reasons perhaps, in fact there appears to be a lot of ambiguity in perceptions of what can be denoted as an 'ethnography'.

Finally, as an example of what has been considered as an ethnography, Czarniawska-Jeorges (1992) identifies Kanter's (1977) *"Men and Women of the Corporation"*. This is an impressive text to read. It involves a variety of projects over a five year period and makes use of a variety of techniques (notably not participant observation), including: observant participation; ethnographic interviews; observation at meetings; informal discussions; conversational interviews; a postal questionnaire; and a general sense of being around, observing, listening, taking notes, and generally being immersed in the culture of the place. The analysis involves 'thick' description and focuses on the microscopic and also ensures that the voices of those being researched is heard so that the discourse of the employees comes through clearly. (Geertz, 1973) The scope of Kanter's analysis is vast, but while on a smaller scale, this research does share many of the general strengths of Kanter's ethnography. Moreover, my research adds a valuable longitudinal aspect that is missing from many ethnographic accounts. It can also draw upon a rich reserve of information across the period giving greater insight into the local occupational and community context, building upon the 'firm-in sector' approach developed by the Aston School (Smith et al, 1990). In this respect, my research follows the methodological pluralism of many similar industrial sociological studies such as:

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Where actors, under the guidance of researchers collect observations of events over a length of time

Beynon's *Working for Ford* (1973), Dennis et al's *Coal Is Our Life* (1956), Batstone et al's *Working Order: Workplace Industrial Relations Over Two Decades* (1973); or in another field of study, Tony Watson's (1994) *In Search of Management*. In each of these studies, a mixture of methods is used, while there is also an ethnographic concern, in that the analysis and interpretations are grounded explicitly in the views and accounts of those being studied.

Perhaps the way forward is to recognise the difficulties of the term ethnography and invent a new one. In coining the neologism 'ergonography', Barbara Czarniawska-Jeorges (1997) illustrates her own difficulty with the term ethnography from etymological and political viewpoints. Czarniawska-Jeorges thus manages to find a more satisfactory term in 'ergonography', which not only distinguishes the type of studies relevant to organisations, but also appears to be more relevant etymologically ¹⁴. Taking this even further, perhaps the methods associated with the term (which stem mainly from anthropology), are also less suitable and practicable in a modern organisational setting. Perhaps it is time therefore for a new 'ergonographical' term to emerge, that employs a wide variety of methods and which is unhindered by the constraints attached to classical ethnographical studies. This thesis shares the ontological and epistemological perspective that is appropriate for an ethnographic approach; the subject of the research is sufficiently qualitative, cultural and social to be consistent with an ethnographic

¹⁴"What I mean is something like "ethnographies of organisations", but I do not wish to employ this term. I retain the 'graphon' (Greek) element: it is clear that our business is to write, but it is not clear what. The prefix 'ethno-' has a somewhat complicated history. In ethology, it means (by use, not by definition) studying what people do outside organisations. our problem here is simply that the word 'ethnography' seems to suggest the opposite of what the organisation researchers are actually studying. 'Etho-' as in ethology.... shares its name with animal studies and although there is nothing to prevent us from extending the constructionist approach to animal studies, it evokes associations somewhat remote from a narrative approach.

'Ergon' is a Greek word meaning 'work' but it is akin to 'organon', 'instrument'. We are writing narratives on work organisations-
ergonographies" (p 202)

approach; and it shares the concerns of many recent ethnographers for a research approach that is reflexive and one which desires the voices of those being researched to be heard. In addition, it adds an extra longitudinal aspect and a concern to triangulate the views of participants which is missing from some traditional ethnographies. There is a case to be made for keeping a qualitative emphasis on social meanings with an ethnographic concern, without 'signing-up' for dogmatic methodologies. I have chosen to adopt a methodological pluralism (Bell and Newby, 1977) in order to achieve the richest picture of the situation at the lock companies. Referring back to the earlier quote from Czarniawska-Jeorges, and turning it on its head, while this research can be seen to be "*embracing an ideology*" of ethnography, it has not necessarily had to "*embrace the methodology*"; at least in its purist or 'classical' form. The procedures of this methodological pluralism are discussed in detail in the next section.

Research procedures

Having established the philosophical reasoning behind the methodology, and having indicated a level of 'methodological consciousness' about this research, the specific procedures followed in the fieldwork are now outlined. The methodology for this thesis focused around two comparisons. The first, a longitudinal comparison at LockCo, was the starting point for this research and plays a greater part in the analysis (as will be discussed later). This longitudinal study is related to a desire to analyse the influence of change, and in particular contextual change in both the local workplace and community context (specific area of inquiry A) and in the wider external environment (specific area of inquiry B). In contrast, the second comparison between LockCo and KeyCo derives from an interest in investigating the ways in which specific differences of organisation, both management and union, can impinge upon employee attitudes where the nature of

their work and community context appear similar¹⁵. Relating to specific areas of inquiry C and D, while the longitudinal comparison allowed a charting of perceptions of commitment and trust over time, the comparison between LockCo and KeyCo provided an opportunity to investigate the way different managerial and union strategies can affect perceptions of commitment and trust.

Setting up the new project at LockCo

Access to LockCo for this fieldwork should have been made easier because of the regular contact which had been maintained over the period with key managers and union officials, of whom there had been little change. In the past, access had always been a relatively simple process and both the company and the union had been accommodating and open, offering facilities to carry out interviews, and allowing employees as much time as was needed off work to be interviewed. However, there did appear to be a change of heart when it came to setting up the new study in late 1995. In reply to a letter requesting permission to begin more interviews, the Personnel Director stated that the senior management team had refused to allow access. The official reason offered was present market difficulties which the company faced (See the section on Ethical Considerations below where possible researcher influence on this change of attitudes is suggested). Whatever the 'true' reason however, it became obvious that I would have to resign myself to the fact that management would not be open to the project. An alternative avenue of access was then negotiated through the trade union, building on contacts made as part of my MA research (Greene, 1995). The present General Secretary had been convenor at LockCo when the first project was carried out and had been a

¹⁵ Personal communication with Mike Terry, February 1999.

helpful contact over the period. Working with the General Secretary and the convenor proved fruitful and the project was given the 'go-ahead'.

There were certain obvious disadvantages with using the union channel. While the company agreed permission for me to come onto the factory premises to meet the convenor, time off for employees to be interviewed, as in the past studies, was out of the question. Consequently, interviews had to be carried out in the lunch breaks of thirty minutes, and so had to be split over several occasions to gain enough in-depth material. Secondly, I was not able to interview managers or attend management meetings to complement the information I gained from workers and union representatives. On the other hand, going through the union channel, with the support of the 'union man', had advantages in terms of building trust with those workers interviewed. From the outset, there was little risk of my being a management pawn. Beynon (1973) also points to more general advantages that can arise from being free from employer pressure with regard to the direction of the research. Indeed, unlike at LockCo, managers at KeyCo had the opportunity to make certain demands with regard to the content of the interviews (see later section).

The Group of Interviewees: The Longitudinal Aspect

The aim was to re-interview as many as possible of those who had been interviewed in previous studies at the company, to allow a degree of direct longitudinal comparison. Due to the fact that the company refused to participate, I was not able to get hold of company personnel lists. However, with an almost total union membership density at the company, union membership lists provided the necessary information. I originally wanted a group of around twenty people which would be a workable amount of in-depth interviews given the restrictions of access. These could then complement the fifteen

interviews that I had already carried out in 1995 (Greene, 1995). Out of the sixty employees interviewed in 1983, thirty two could be identified who were still employed at LockCo. This formed the initial list. Three people refused to be re-interviewed, although the reasons for this refusal were not disclosed. In addition, due to many of these employees being on long term sick leave, working difficult shift arrangements or having left the firm during 1995, the list was finally scaled down to eleven re-interviews. I also approached recent retirees who had been interviewed in the previous studies. The names of retirees were taken from union records of lifetime members and a general letter was sent out asking for volunteer interviewees. Three people responded, who agreed to be interviewed. Thus, the number of direct re-interviews was fourteen. In complement to these interviews, I was also given the opportunity to interview six other employees who fitted the profile of the re-interview group, having more than ten years service which fitted in with the general longitudinal characteristics of the interview group. One of these employees had been interviewed as part of the study in 1987; so again a direct longitudinal comparison could be made. Overall, the ideal was to re-interview as many people as possible, and having done this, these could then be complemented by the other interviews. One might ask what these extra interviews contributed, and certainly, they could not stand as direct comparisons. However, they are valuable sources of complementary data to the core group and do match up in terms of the personal characteristics profile of the re-interview group. As a research strategy, it seems more beneficial, time willing, to take advantage of every opportunity for data collection, particularly in a qualitative study such as this, where the emphasis is on richness of data rather than quantitative validity.

A question that could be asked is whether the views, perceptions and orientations of those interviewed are representative of those employed at LockCo on a wider scale. I was not concerned to establish the validity of the interview group in any positivistic sense. However the need for authenticity of account if I am to make generalisations of any kind, even if only across the workplace, must be recognised. One possible limitation of the interview group is that this has committed me to a cohort of workers who are older and who have long service periods in the company. It might be anticipated that they might have different perspectives to younger and more recent employees. There are obvious implications of this with regard to questions of generalisability, which are discussed later. However, my concern was to see how the views and attitudes of a particular group of workers have changed over time and therefore can only gain advantages from the nature of the interview group. The advantage of being able to interview exactly the same people fifteen years later was an opportunity that could not be missed. It must also be recognised that the lock industry is not typical of British manufacturing and the older age profile of the interview group is very similar to the overall age profile of the firms involved in this study (See Table 2). In fact, the average age of an employee at LockCo in 1997 is one year older than the average age of the interview group. There is a more significant difference in the length of service, with the average service being 14 years more in the interview group than in the wider company workforce. However, the average length of service of 13 years over the whole workforce is still a long period of time, and reflects the traditions of the company and the industry. It would have been useful to have interviewed some newer employees to gain some balance in the data, but restrictions of time and access did not allow this and is something that could be taken up in future projects.

	Average Age	Average Length of Service
1996/7 Interview Group	53 years	27 years
Whole Company	54 years	13 years

Table 2 : Average age and length of service calculated from union membership lists

The 1996/7 collection of interviews is also reflective of that from 1983 in terms of gender with only a small shift in the ratio (See Table 3).

	Male	Female	Total
1983	36 (60% of total)	24 (40% of total)	60
1996/7	13 (65% of total)	7 (35% of total)	20
Workforce in 1997	241 (47% of total)	264 (53% of total)	505

Table 3: Breakdown of the 1983 and 1996/7 Interview groups by gender. Workforce breakdown taken from union membership lists.

There has been an attrition in the number of people interviewed between 1983 and 1996/7. However, this attrition has not been reflected in the characteristics of the people involved, indeed every attempt has been made to re-interview the same people, or interview people who share similar work histories. The re-visited interview group is thus reflective of the earlier group in every way except that it is smaller.

Use of Past Interview Material .

The research project draws upon a large body of interview material over the period.

RESEARCH PROJECT	ARCHIVE OF MATERIAL
1983	LockCo Interviews with 60 shopfloor employees. Included 13 shop stewards and the convenor. Interviews with 29 managers.
1987	LockCo Interviews with 10 shop stewards. Interviews with 10 managers.
1995	LockCo Interviews with 15 shopfloor employees. Included 6 shop stewards Union Interview with LockCo convenor and Union President. Interview with Union General Secretary
1996/7	LockCo Interviews with 20 shopfloor employees. Included 14 direct re-interviews from 1983. Included 3 shop stewards and 6 ex-shop stewards. Included 4 recent retirees. Union Interviews with the District and National Organisers. KeyCo Interviews with 19 shopfloor employees Included the works convenor. Interview with a recent retiree and ex-works convenor. Interviews with 9 managers.

Table 4: Archive of Interview Material 1983-1998

Following initial contact at LockCo in 1979, groups of managers were interviewed in the early 1980s. Interviews were conducted in 1983 with sixty shop floor employees on a wide range of issues with respect to attitudes to their work, the work place, management, and the trade union, including its role both at plant and at a wider social and political level (Ackers and Black, 1991). A second set of interviews was conducted in 1987/88

with ten shop stewards and managers, in comparison with another non-lock company (Ackers 1988). A third series of interviews was conducted in 1995 with 15 shop floor employees and all union officers (Greene 1995; Black et al, 1997).

The degree to which these interviews had already been analysed and used varied from study to study. From the 1983 interviews, some content analysis had been completed although little further use had been made of this. I read through all of these interviews, using the content analysis that had been completed in order to gain some general idea about attitudes at that time. These interviews had been transcribed on a typewriter and therefore could not be entered into my own database programme (see later discussion and Appendix Four). However, the group of fourteen re-interviews was selected from this 1983 collection and re-typed on a word processor so that I was able to work with the interviews on-line. I then completed detailed analysis of this group of interviews in an identical way to the 1996 re-interview group. I am thus able to present a more general picture from 1983 using the whole cohort, whilst being able to 'home in' on the re-interviews in a more detailed way to enhance the account. The 1987 collection of interviews has never been fully transcribed, however detailed notes have been made from the interview tapes that I was able to use. In addition, unlike the 1983 collection, detailed analysis of these interviews has been written up and provided another valuable source of information (Ackers, 1988; Ackers and Black, 1991; Ackers and Black, 1992). The 1995 collection of interviews had been fully transcribed and was available to work with on-line. Some analysis of these interviews has also been written up (Greene, 1995; Black et al, 1997).

The Comparative Study at KeyCo

It is important to note that this comparative study stands as a substantial project in its own right, incurring similar demands in terms of resources and effort, and producing a substantial body of data and information. However, in this thesis, it is used primarily as a tool for comparison with LockCo and is given lesser weight on balance in the analysis. Many of the overall implications of the analysis of the KeyCo data have not been discussed here. The hope is that it will inform separate papers in the future outside of this thesis.

The rationale for conducting this comparative case study was firstly in order to triangulate the findings from LockCo, however, this was not the main significance of the study at KeyCo. As has been discussed earlier in Chapter Two, KeyCo shares a similar historical, sociological, product and work organisation background to that of LockCo. One might anticipate therefore that attitudes of workers at both firms might be similar, (although there is a large and interesting debate about this issue, particularly within the coal industry (see Ackers, 1998). A study at KeyCo thus provided a useful comparison exploring the ways in which specific differences of organisation (either management or union) can impinge upon worker attitudes and perceptions. Were attitudes similar across the industry or were they largely workplace-based?

Following the procedure undertaken at LockCo, the union convenor at KeyCo was my first point of contact. Having gained her support for the project, she suggested that management at her firm would also be supportive. The Personnel Director was contacted and management support was given for the study, which they felt would also be of benefit to them in gauging employee opinion at a time of re-structuring in the firm. In contrast to LockCo therefore, KeyCo management were very open to the project and

accommodating in terms of access, facilities and information. Importantly, they agreed to allow employees to be interviewed during work time, for which ninety minute slots were allocated.

A group of ten managers and twenty employees was identified, allowing sufficient comparison in terms of numbers to be made with LockCo. The employees were picked randomly from company personnel lists but included only long service employees (at least ten years service) to broadly match the profile of the interview group at LockCo. There was also a concern to get a distribution across gender and department lines. The interview schedules followed the same interview agenda as those at LockCo, however there were additional areas involving particular issues relevant to the specific company context, and issues that managers at the company wished to be discussed. A separate interview schedule for the management interviews was also designed (See Appendix 1b). Due to problems of illness and scheduling, the eventual group was slightly smaller than originally intended and included nine managers and nineteen employees.

The Core Technique: Interviews

The interview designs can be seen to an extent as 'constructed replications' of the previous studies (gaining exact replications for the point of quantitative validity was obviously not an objective). The research arena has been entered with a clear agenda of theoretical issues that were to be investigated and compared with past data. In addition, the longitudinal focus demands that there was a broad continuity of method and theoretical issues. For these reasons, an unstructured interview approach that simply allowed the 'stories to unfold' was not appropriate, as it would not meet the research objectives. With regard to content, as far as possible, the same areas of questions that were asked in previous studies, were asked in 1996/7. However, due to differences in

research focus between the projects, variations in access, and the existence of new ideas and issues relevant to the present context, the interviews do vary. However there is sufficient replication to allow comparison between the studies.

The interviews were semi-structured with detailed interview agendas (see Appendix One). Having some structure to the interviews became increasingly important bearing in mind the time constraints of access, with employees at LockCo able to give up only a limited amount of lunch breaks to be interviewed. The overall benefits of the interviews, were that they allowed considerable flexibility, giving the respondent plenty of space to discuss issues freely, while also providing enough structure to be able to compare the interviews across company and time. In addition, I had the advantage of being able to interview people on several occasions; indeed one shop steward was interviewed on two separate occasions in 1995 and then again on three separate times in the latest fieldwork. The benefit of this is that it allowed time for reflection so that I could return with fresh questions, clarify certain points that had come up before and establish a more personal acquaintanceship.

Interview Agenda

Here, the broad question areas that formed the interview agenda are discussed (which summarise the full outlines of interview agendas found in Appendix One)

General Questions

This area of questioning addressed employees attitudes to their work. This involved job content; skill level and training; opinions of their terms and conditions of work, including their work environment and wage levels; and level of personal control over their work organisation, work effort and speed of work. The aim here was to relax the

interviewees, allowing them to speak generally about the work that they did and in order to gain an overall impression of the experience of working life in the factory.

Questions about the Union

This area of questioning aimed to investigate workers' views of trade unions both at national and workplace level. It involved discussion of views about why unions existed, reasons for membership and views on traditional union rights to strike, and to have a political and social role outside of the workplace. One objective was to generate some idea of expectations of their union and its role in the workplace. More specifically to their workplace union, the discussion involved views of union effectiveness and how their union delivered upon the expectations already presented; drawing on views of union power and bargaining strength. This was in order to build up an impression of what is seen as a legitimate role for the union in the eyes of employees in order to identify an agenda of what the union should be doing, and how has this changed over the period. The concern here was to uncover the frame of reference of people, recognising that certain issues may not have been part of the frame of reference or been articulated before. Issues of union democracy were also discussed, looking at views of communication within the union and the representativeness and accountability of union representatives. Workers were also asked about their personal participation in union business, events and issues. The hope was that an impression could be built up of views of union leadership and whether they felt involvement was encouraged or discouraged by the union representatives. All these issues are seen as relevant influences on the levels and nature of commitment.

Questions about Management and the Company

Here, the discussion turned to views of the relationship between the shopfloor, the union and managers. Employees were asked about the extent of contact that they had with management at different levels and their views of the relationship of the union with management. Questions also involved views of the legitimate role of a manager. The objective was to gain an impression of what employees expect managers to do as part of their job, what are seen as boundaries to managerial prerogative and how far existing managers are seen to meet these expectations. This discussion helped build up a picture of the present state of relations between management and employees, whether this has led to a realisation of employee potential and whether employees had felt more committed to management and company at different times over the period and why.

Questions about Identity and Commitment

I wanted to generate a picture of the affiliations felt by employees to various social groups in the workplace, (for example whether that be to the union, to their fellow workers, to the company, to themselves as individuals or to any combination of these). This connected to their impressions of the extent of separation between management and the shop floor and between union leaders and rank and file and whether there was any idea of class feeling, union solidarity or company loyalty. This area of questions also involved perceptions of the level of trust between the three parties in the employment relationship, which links to discussions about 'dual commitment'.

Questions about Community

Before the interviews were conducted, each employee was sent a form asking them to provide background information including how they were recruited to the company, their work history to date, their job title, their place of residence, and whether they had other

family members working in the lock industry. This was in order to provide factual information about the occupational community of the lock industry. The interviews then expanded upon this information, discussing whether social ties existed with fellow employees outside of work; looking at workers' expectations for their children, and whether younger family members had followed them into the industry; and the level of company and union involvement in the community.

Carrying out the interviews

The interviewees were approached by the convenor at both companies, using a letter from myself introducing the project. This was a deliberate strategy, in order to legitimise the project through the union, rather than being seen as sponsored by management. At LockCo, the convenor organised the time-tabling of interviews to fit in with the circumstances of the interviewees involved. At KeyCo, line managers organised the time-tabling, largely because it involved time off from work. Interviews began at LockCo in February 1996 and were completed by December/January 1997. At KeyCo interviews began in May 1996 and were carried out over an intensive four week period. At LockCo, the interviews were conducted in the Convenor's office on the shopfloor. At KeyCo the interviews were carried out at the factory premises in a vacant office away from the shop floor. Apart from one incidence of problems with the recording equipment, and one person who refused to be taped, all the interviews were tape recorded. On the occasion when taping was impossible, I took notes. The tapes were then transcribed verbatim using professional transcription equipment; including all hesitations, pauses, accents and colloquisms. Due to restrictions of time however, I chose not to use the Jefferson style of transcription (for a summary see Potter and

Wetherell, 1987), which reportedly takes twenty times the length of the interview to transcribe.

As previously discussed, the overall format of my interviews was more structured than that of the studies in 1983 and 1987. However, there was still flexibility over such things as the way that questions were asked and the order in which they were asked depending on the responses given. Overall, the aim was to cover the same areas within the interview but there was considerable flexibility over the means to this end. In addition, if someone began to discuss issues not directly connected to the agenda, they were not stopped and directed back but allowed to continue. Finally, people were not forced to respond. In fact a non-response, or avoided question was as interesting as an answered one, and such occurrences have been highlighted where relevant to the analysis. The general philosophy was to allow the interviewee to talk freely. There are possible dangers here in not being able to gather relevant information around the broad question agenda. However, while we are often encouraged to make interviewing as neutral as possible, Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) point to the usefulness of directed questioning for the penetration of fronts, as long as a reflexive approach is taken to analysis of these questions. While review of the interview questionnaire by myself and my supervisors before interviews began, means that I do not feel that there were any specifically directed questions, on occasions, it was necessary to encourage people to speak and expand upon their answers. Where there is any chance that the person was prompted to say something, this has been highlighted in the presentation of findings.

A variety of interview methods has been used. There are some open-ended components to the interviews in that I have not been closed to the possibility that unexpected issues may evolve from the responses. Issues, events, thoughts, motivations and contexts that I

had not considered when formulating my interview agenda evolved out of the analysis and informed my ideas so that the agenda was amended in some cases. In the same way, experience of the first interviews informed my methodology and suggested better ways of asking certain questions. I have also made some use of more structured techniques in order to provide some means of dealing with the mass of attitudinal information. This is the case with some of the “dual commitment” questions. Drawing on Sherer & Morishima (1989), questions have been included in my interview design which have an option of the use of response cards (commonly asking for a choice of one from four possible responses on a continuum, for example, ‘Agree Strongly’ to ‘Disagree Strongly’). However, these were adapted to a qualitative emphasis. I do not use these questions to compare employees on a measured scale as they were originally used, but rather as a way to inform my own interview vocabulary and as a tool for general comparison. They were also useful tools if the interviewee was having difficulty in articulating their ideas: providing a focus for their discussion. Rather than accepting the initial response as complete, respondents were encouraged to elaborate upon these initial responses so that a more in-depth view of their meaning could be acquired. I was also keen to take an approach where the ‘taken for grantedness’ of certain roles, functions, assumptions, perceptions were recognised and then challenged in a phenomenological way. For example, in discussions of union power, after discussing with people their perceptions of whether their union was powerful or not, I then asked them what characteristics they felt made a union powerful. This was then contrasted with a list I had constructed (see Appendix Three) of possible characteristics, some of which people were asked to comment on and discuss whether they felt these characteristics did make a union powerful. In some cases therefore, people were considering elements of union power, or possible roles and functions of their union that they had not thought of, or articulated

before. While the spontaneous response was perhaps most important, there is value in unpacking those ideas and perceptions that form our world views but which have not been articulated before. Response cards and lists were a useful way of stimulating such discussion in certain cases.

It is clear therefore that I have used a broad range of interview methods, with a qualitative emphasis on acquiring the most in-depth responses possible. The primary objective has been to acquire the most authentic account as possible from the workers I spoke to, within the constraints and circumstances of my particular research context. In order to fulfil this objective, I chose a methodology that used a mixture of interview methods as a way to 'weigh up the evidence'. Morgan and Smircich (1980) point to the importance of not 'pigeon-holing' techniques to fit with designated epistemological views. Any given technique can lend itself to a variety of uses according to the orientation of the researcher. In a similar way Geertz points out that: *"From one point of view, doing ethnography is establishing rapport, selecting informants, transcribing texts, taking genealogies, mapping fields, keeping a diary, and so on. But it is not these things, techniques, and received procedures that define the enterprise. What defines it is the kind of intellectual effort it is"* (1973: 6).

The virtues of techniques and methods must be seen within the context of the assumptions on which the researcher acts (which in my case involves the questions that I am asking). Morgan and Smircich warn that concentrating on methods obscures the link between the assumptions that the researcher holds and the research effort, which gives the illusion that it is methods, rather than the orientation of the researcher that generates particular forms of knowledge (1980: 499). So, an assessment of my own research should look more at my thinking behind it than the actual methods used. All my

interviews shared an ethnographic ontological and epistemological position which attempts to uncover the picture of the social world investigated in terms of the views of the interviewees, with every effort made to present their own views and allow their voices to be heard.

'Coding' and Analysis of Interviews

The content analysis of the interviews was conducted manually although making use of a personally developed database programme on a word processor to hold the data (See Appendix Four). General categories were developed initially from the interview agendas themselves, which were expanded upon and subdivided by further content analysis. (Examples of coded interview material can be found in Appendix Four). Some discourse analysis techniques have been used also as I am interested in the idea of uncovering vocabularies of motive (Wright-Mills, 1940) and the way in which rhetoric and vocabularies have changed or remained constant over the period. In general, I have looked for the existence of shared meanings among the views of workers I have interviewed. 'Interpretative repertoires' are lexicons of terms and metaphors which people draw upon to characterise and evaluate actions and events (Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Potter, 1996; Moscovici, 1984). The researcher can look for consistency in the use of repertoires among a group of people, as long as the context of that particular group is emphasised. Such shared vocabularies or interpretative repertoires have been highlighted in the analysis.

Other Important sources of information

The use of complementary evidence was an important part of the methodology. While the focus of the fieldwork was on the in-depth interviews, these would not have been enough by

themselves. In Chapter Two, there was a presentation of the diverse sources of literature and research that informed the specific area of inquiry in this thesis. While these sources can be seen in some cases, as lending themselves to different methodological approaches, the way in which they were used as part of this thesis, did not require a restriction to one single methodological technique, but rather encourages the kind of methodological pluralism which aims to achieve the richest possible understanding. In particular, some of the criticisms offered within the organisational commitment literature suggested the need for research to be located within a framework of understanding broader power, institutional and social relationships, both within and outside of the workplace. Interviews of the kind used in this thesis can offer much information relevant to this broader framework but more is needed. Thus, care has been taken to take advantage of other rich sources of information, which are outlined below.

Other Interviews

Formal interviews were carried out with all full time officials of the union, plus the convenors at both LockCo and KeyCo. I was also able to interview an ex-convenor and his deputy at LockCo, and an ex-convenor from KeyCo, (who had held the position from 1970-81), in order to gain some longitudinal information about the union. All of these union interviews were conducted in an identical way to the employee interviews, however, they did not follow the interview agenda so rigorously. Due to ease of time, these interviews tended to be longer with much more flexibility built in. Certain interviews have proved very valuable to the analysis, such as those with the LockCo convenor, which is often drawn upon throughout the thesis.

Observation

There have also been numerous periods of observation. This has included being present at shopfloor meetings convened by union representatives, sitting in at four shop steward committee meetings and attending union events such as their industrial symposium for discussion of foreign lock imports and union Annual General meetings (AGMs). There have also been various factory visits and periods of generally 'hanging around' in the convenor's office and on the shopfloor. Notes were always taken either at the time, or as soon as possible after the event.

Informal Contact

I have had weekly informal chats with the convenor at LockCo, both face to face and on the telephone. At LockCo, this has often meant that I have accompanied the convenor as he walked around the shop floor speaking to members, and have sat in on meetings with members who have walked into the office by chance as we were speaking. Since the interview fieldwork finished in early 1997, I have met with the convenor at LockCo regularly at least once a month to keep up to date with developments at the company. Contact with the convenor at KeyCo has been less frequent although I can account for four scheduled meetings plus half a dozen informal chats on the shopfloor and on the telephone. I have taken detailed notes either at the time or as soon as possible afterwards for all of these meetings and periods of observation.

Observant participation

From September 1997 to July 1998, the convenor at LockCo agreed to write a diary of his day to day experiences as negotiations with the new owner company developed. This can be seen as a technique of observant participation (Czarniawska-Jeorges, 1992),

where the observations of the convenor were collected under my guidance, with suggestions and directions for the writing of the diary. The diary entries outlined any official meetings, including the names and positions of the people, and the subject and outcome of the event. In addition, the convenor was encouraged to write down any thoughts or feelings as they occurred to him, mental notes of what he had to do in the future, and any accounts of informal meetings and discussions that he had.

Documentation

Finally, full use has been made of documentary material from the union, companies, local press and national economic organisations collected over the whole period. This has included: company and union annual reports, minutes of meetings, notices from the company notice boards, union rule books, written codes of practice, newsletters, commemorative booklets (such as for long service presentations), trade reports on the lock industry, secondary literature on the history of the lock industry, pamphlets from the Lock Museum, a selection of newspaper cuttings from local and national newspapers across the period 1983-1998.

Ethical considerations and Authenticity of Account

Here, the validation of my analysis or the authenticity of my account is linked to ethical issues about ethnographic research and allowing the voices of the researched to be heard, and a reflexive approach to the role of the researcher. The discussion of whether generalisations can be made from case study data is often raised with qualitative research. Case studies do, to some extent, suffer from difficulties of generaliseability and the problem of how to get from an ethnographic account, to broader interpretations and more abstract analyses is a valid point, but certainly not a new problem. The thematic

links between this thesis and wider debates and theories are clear, but it seems futile to make a study such as this, into something that it is not, and make hollow claims that profess to see the world 'in a teacup' or in 'a grain of sand'. The main strength of this study lies in its micro-focus; the importance of this work is its circumstantiality. It constructs a picture of the particular context through what Geertz calls 'thick description' (1973: 10) where many different elements of data are used and presented to build up densely textured information. The value of the small, in-depth study is in uncovering the dynamics of relationships within contexts, and providing opportunities for future research so that we can begin to generalise within different cases and draw broader conclusions that can fill in the gaps left by the wider debates and theories.

Ethnographic authenticity

There is much literature that clearly points to the weaknesses of many ethnographic accounts (Hammersley, 1992; Rosaldo, 1989). Much of this weakness stems from an assertion by researchers that the account describes the particular social realm as 'it really is', or that it is a 'true account'. There is a general claim made by many ethnographers that they are able to present what the participants see. Anthropologists considered the ethnographer's ability to describe what the researcher has seen and heard within the framework of the social group's view of reality to be one of the primary contributions of ethnography (Fetterman, 1989). The presentation of findings from the view of the participants is however, largely an ideal, which perhaps provides another justification for my use of a range of techniques and comparisons, rather than relying solely on a classical ethnography. All social scientists attribute a point of view and interpretations to the people whose actions we analyse. We can only aim to present with the most practical

accuracy what people think they are doing, what meanings they give to the objects and events in their lives and experience (Geertz, 1973: 23).

There is a case to be made for the need to maintain some objectivity and distance between the researcher and the researched, indeed too much subjectivity has been seen as a weakness of some ethnographic research. Some ethnographic work has been criticised for being flawed by partial perspectives, what is called “*over-rapport*”, where the views of the researched are taken over without question. Hammersley and Atkinson (1983: 98) specifically mention Paul Willis’ *Learning to Labour* (1977) in these terms, where the book becomes a celebration of the lads involved rather than an objective analysis of their views in context. However, it is equally problematic to believe that the researcher can be completely objective or detached. Both the positivist and naturalist paradigms ¹⁶ share a fundamental misconception in seeing a sharp distinction between social science and the observer (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983). Both approaches attempt to eliminate the effects of the researcher on data and believe that a body of data can be isolated that is separate and uncontaminated by the researcher. Ecological validity involves the effects of the researcher and the procedures they use on the responses of the people being studied. One weakness of the naturalist approach is that this is not recognised, because even in so-called ‘natural’ settings, questions of ecological validity arise. The notion of a

¹⁶ Positivism:-Its aim was to promote the status of experimental and survey research and quantitative forms of analysis in the 1930s and 1940s. The distinction between qualitative and quantitative methodological traditions became an epistemological chasm. The tenets of positivism can be seen to include a) a model for social research based upon physical science and the logic of the experiment; b) the existence of universal laws with a premium placed on the generaliseability of findings; c) the acceptance of an objective reality; d) the language of neutral observation where an epistemological and ontological priority is given to directly observable phenomenon (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983; Fetterman, 1989). In general, every attempt is made to eliminate the effect of the observer by developing explicit, standardised sets of procedures.

Naturalism:- In a counter argument to positivism, theorists in the 1960s began offering an alternative paradigm based on the view that the social world should be studied in its ‘natural state’. The search for universal laws is rejected in favour of detailed descriptions of the concrete experience of life, while the search for causal relationships is also abandoned because human actions are

distinction between natural and artificial (positivistic) settings is misleading and artificial settings are still part of society and social interaction. While the researcher can control to an extent how much the data is 'contaminated', the real force of the argument lies in the fact that all methods (even experiments and survey interviews with their rigorous, standardised procedures) are open to those processes of symbolic interpretation:- *"The moral to be drawn is that all social research takes the form of participant observation; it involves participating in the social world in whatever role and reflecting on the products of that participation"* (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983: 16). It is thus important to be reflexive about the account that I have presented and about my role in the research process.

Reflexivity is seen as representing a framework in which to regard the authenticity of an ethnographic account (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983; Hammersley, 1994; Potter, 1996; Linstead 1994). The researcher must make explicit the specific biases that underlie the choice of research topic, the methodology and the analysis ¹⁷. The general view is that whenever a social scientist is present, the situation is not just what it would have been without the social scientist. Ethnographers then usually counter this by stating that because all the constraints of their ordinary social situation are operative, they can pride themselves on seeing and hearing what people would have said and done had the observers not been there. An argument against this is eloquently put by Becker (1997)

based upon or infused by social meanings, intentions, motives, attitudes and beliefs. Methods should be sensitive to the nature of the setting and there should be fidelity of the phenomenon and not to any methodological principles.

¹⁷However, it should be noted that an unreflexive approach to reflexivity can be seen as having a positivistic aspect (Linstead 1994). By declaring the bias, the assumption is that it ceases to be a problem and so exhorts us still not to behave as though bias does exist. Personal disclosure should not be understood as an attempt to declare bias so that it might be discounted or as a capacity for self analysis which might dispel fears of the author's unreliability. It should be seen as a phenomenology of the possible origins of the researchers' interest and an exploration of the ideas emergent with it (p1335, Linstead 1994)

who discusses the role of the confidentiality commonly offered to participants which insulates the participant and acts as a persuasion for open and frank conversation/interview. Of course, confidentiality is not an ordinary situation and in itself is artificial. From a critical discourse analysis perspective, when the analysis is dependent on participants' theories of how they would behave in the circumstances detailed in the interview, the discourse is not necessarily of what the participants actually do, or say, but what they imagine they would do or say (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). However the issue of interviews creating an artificial reality, can be exaggerated (Czarniawska-Jeorges 1992). Giving answers to the interviewer is part of making sense in, and of organisations, as long as it reveals a pattern. As Czarniawska-Jeorges (1992) usefully recognises, we can see interviews as "*provoked accounts*"; all observations are participatory and it is only the degree of participation that differs. The most important thing is that any interpretations of the meanings attributed by the participants and any analysis of what people say and do are made explicit. So while interviews may have disadvantages in terms of being able to 'represent reality', they can provide a very valuable and rich source of information, particularly in their in-depth form.

Perhaps the most important issue involved in authenticating my methodology is to avoid assertions of 'truth' by making clear to the reader the following issues; why I have chosen certain subjects, responses, issues, as relevant and what assumptions ground what I see as relevant? This deals with the question not of whether my description of the situation itself is accurate and valid, but more whether the rationale behind my description is valid (Hammersley, 1992: 26). The agenda for the interviews was established from the previous studies, therefore, the group of employees chosen and the issues that were discussed, were chosen partly because of a regard for longitudinal

consistency. Secondly, the boundaries of the research area have been established as an investigation of the employment relationship within the context of British industrial relations. This leads to a selection of responses and areas of discussion, relevant to this bounded subject area. As the interviews developed, many issues which were discussed, are not present in this thesis, but may be taken up in future papers and projects. I was also concerned primarily to uncover the general view of the situation and so those areas which are particularly highlighted, are those which formed the shared 'interpretative repertoires' of the group of employees across the period. There was less interest in individual thoughts and views although significant exceptions and non-responses have been highlighted on occasion.

The next issue involves the researcher's intervention in the research situation. How is my interpretation actively constructed? What was my own input to the construction of the social situation? Did my presence have any affect on the social situation that I am describing? All of these questions direct the focus away from a claim to presenting an independent reality, but rather presenting what Hammersley (1992: 52) terms "*subtle realism*". This means that the presented account can be treated as social phenomena that I am seeking to understand and explain and as indicators of the possible cultural perspectives held by the people producing them. The aim is not of reproducing reality, simply representing it. Often, it is the case that even without volition, the researcher can end up affecting the research situation, which again points out the futility of trying to remain perfectly neutral. A personal example of this offers an alternative explanation to the reticence of the LockCo management to my research project. The study which formed my MA thesis (Greene, 1995) was carried out through the union channel. Once the fieldwork was completed, a report of the findings was offered to the people involved,

firstly in order to provide feedback, and secondly, to offer something tangible in return for all the effort, time and resources put in by both the interviewees and those involved in organising the research. This report uncovered much negative feeling of employees towards their managers and the company in general. Unbeknownst to myself, this report was then used by the union, as part of the negotiation process for the pay settlement and understandably had caused some management consternation. As the convenor at LockCo stated with regard to access, 'while it's not definitely down to the report, it did not ease the situation'. Whatever the official line offered by management was, perhaps I had offended the company firstly by not researching through the company channel to begin with, and secondly due to the nature of the findings uncovered by the study. The end result was that I had changed the situation somewhat at LockCo. Perhaps my report had exacerbated an already antagonistic situation, providing the union with extra ammunition at the negotiating table and therefore affected the employment relationship.

Another example concerns the relationship of researcher and researched. Due to the length of time I have spent at the company, and the personal nature of the relationship that I have developed with the convenor at LockCo, I have found that I have become somewhat of a confidante for the convenor. The difficulty faced here, is that there is a mutual reciprocity in the relationship between researcher and researched, where in return for the effort put in by the gatekeepers like the convenor, it is hard to remain neutral and objectively distanced from the situation. The convenor has seen me as a sounding board for ideas and thoughts about issues and future policies, and it is difficult not to offer advice or support when asked. The danger is that however neutral I have tried to remain, our discussions have altered the way in which he has acted and consequently, the attitudes that members have towards him and the union. Even without any expressions of

support from me, perhaps the simple existence of an outlet for discussion has allowed the convenor to sort out ideas and offered alternatives, which may not have developed without my presence. In addition, there is the chance that I may begin to see the social situation 'through his eyes' and begin to take on his interpretations of the situation. The only guard against this is to try and be as reflexive as possible about any interpretations that are made, and to make full use of the complementary evidence and information that I have in order to triangulate those interpretations.

On the other hand, there are advantages of developing close and personal relationships, particularly when the research is dealing with sensitive attitudinal information as mine was. Being able to build up and maintain relationships of trust is crucial if people are to offer their 'honest' opinions. People had to believe that I was sincere about claims of confidentiality. Moreover, the fact that I have become a familiar sight in the factory, and have had the opportunity to have some kind of role in affecting the situation there, can only be a strength in terms of the qualitative nature of the information which I was able to gather. I do not believe that people would have been as open and relaxed as they were, or that I would have been able to gain the richness of views and opinions that I was able to acquire if I had not achieved that sense of familiarity. People became very trusting; disclosing and discussing sensitive information and issues in front of me with no fear of recrimination. Thus the very subjectivity that positivistic researchers try and guard against is actually an ethnographic strength, which while carrying its own dangers (as discussed earlier), is not a weakness by itself per se. In addition, I feel that the account I have constructed indicates some social and intellectual distance so that analysis from an outsider's perspective has also occurred.

Finally, the account will be judged on the basis of the adequacy of the evidence offered in support. (Hammersley, 1992). The main concern therefore has been to establish my findings as sufficiently plausible and credible to be accepted not only by fellow researchers, but also by the research subjects themselves. The aim has been to allow the people who have been involved in the study the opportunity to read my account and give me their reactions. The first step of this has been to give the interview transcripts back to those who were interviewed to check that they thought that the transcript was an accurate presentation of their interview. They were also free to add to, and amend the transcript or to write additional comments. Nine out of the seventeen interviewees who were sent transcripts responded. They all agreed that the transcripts were accurate representations of their view. Those that added comments or amendments only added information rather than changing responses or disagreeing with what they had said at interview. The second phase of this process has been to give pieces of analysis to those involved. Primarily, this has involved the convenor at LockCo. He has offered helpful advice and editing as to the limitations of the analysis, pointing to areas of generalisation or where there are obvious exceptions to the analysis presented. These responses have provided a useful gauge as to the representativeness of my account and instils some confidence that the overall direction of the account is 'along the right lines' and that a fair attempt has been made to present the views of the workers involved. This follows the example of other ethnographers who have used this form of authenticity check (See Willis, 1977). There is a danger that circular analysis that may arise from this exercise, thus, the account has not been changed after considering the responses of the research subjects, but any relevant responses have been presented within the final analysis, allowing the reader to make the final judgement of the authenticity of the account.

Conclusion

The foregoing discussion has established the use of a qualitative methodology within a broad ethnographic paradigm for my research. It has justified the use of this paradigm, outlined the specific procedures followed in fieldwork and analysis, and offered a reflexive account of the ethical issues involved and the ways in which the reader can see the account as authentic. While the overall choice of methods does not fit into some clearly defined methodology or set of techniques, its strengths far outweigh its weaknesses. These are in depth case studies, which confront common criticisms of only being a 'snapshot' or ignoring context, by being both longitudinal and comparative. Such a viewpoint is clear in recommendations for research at the shopfloor level. As Thompson and Ackroyd outline (1995: 629), most researchers do not have the opportunities for the kind of access which allows them longitudinal, in-depth observational study, which has the best chance of picking up on what is happening on the shopfloor. I have been lucky enough to have this kind of access, particularly at LockCo where the research can draw upon a rich reserve of information from past studies, and has been able to make use of a wide variety of sources in order to gain the richest picture possible.

Chapter Four: Views from the Shopfloor

This chapter presents an account of the perceptions, views and attitudes of the groups of workers over the time period at LockCo and of the comparative study at KeyCo. This account has been divided into four sections based around the theme of 'them and us', each dealing with one area within the 'triangle' of the employment relationship. Each section involves a discussion of the extent to which the relationship has remained constant, or has changed over the time period through the eyes of shopfloor workers. Re-iterating the methodological logic here, the comparison at LockCo relates to an objective to analyse the influence of change, in particular contextual change (as related to the 'specific areas of inquiry' set out in Chapter Two). A comparison is then made with the account at KeyCo, to investigate the ways in which specific differences of organisation, (either union or management), can impinge upon employee attitudes. An emphasis is placed on the core interview data, which is then surrounded by and contextualised with the other sources, (as presented in Chapter Three) so that a more complete and in-depth representation of the situation can be built up. Each person's account and each source is used as a form of check against the other, thus the overall picture presented is that of consistent tendencies rather than presenting views that were unique or representative of only one person. Quotations and illustrative examples have been chosen that are more widely supported but important exceptions are also mentioned. This follows the path of other ethnographically-based work (Kanter, 1977; 297). Due to the fact that attention has been focused on the shared world views of the groups and because of the qualitative nature of the thesis, quantitative measurement in the presentation of findings is reduced to a minimum. The concern has not been with comparing numbers or proportions of people holding one viewpoint or another over the period in any precise quantitative way,

but rather to gain a general feel of the predominant frame of reference, orientation and vocabularies, and to focus on the qualitative substance of the evidence. Where proportions or numbers are used, it is to highlight some particularly striking difference or consistency. Finally, there is an emphasis placed on 'hearing the voices' of both those who were interviewed and with those whom I came into contact with more informally, and so the use of direct verbatim quotations is particularly important to the account in building up a textured, 'thick description' (discussed in Chapter Three). While references are made within the findings chapter, to the ways that particular sets of themes and issues relate specifically to the research agenda (as outlined in the 'specific areas of inquiry'), the task of analysing and explaining the findings is largely left to the Chapter Five.

Chapter Four: Section One. 'Them': The Management

This section presents the first part of the account of views from the shopfloor as set out in Chapter One relating to the worker-management 'corner' of the triangle of the employment relationship. It begins by discussing some possible difficulties in representing views of 'Them' from discursive data. Secondly, a presentation of the formal institutional differentiation and demarcation of 'Them' within the two companies is given, in order to build up the contextual picture of the parties involved in the employment relationship. The chapter then presents the main area of interest, which is with the subjective views and attitudes of the groups of workers with regard to 'Them' within this context. Here, the most significant findings with regard to workers' views of management are explored, looking specifically at the general relationship between employees and managers, their expectations of managers, and the legitimacy of the management role. This is in order to build up a picture of the nature of commitment to management and to the company, drawing on the ideas and themes that were brought out in Chapter Two with regard to the possible impact of changes in the wider context, and the complexity of perceptions of employee commitment and identity over time (the longitudinal comparison at LockCo), and in response to differing managerial strategies (the comparison with KeyCo). The objective is to offer some general idea of the orientation of the workforce and then to focus down on specific issues and triangulate with an illustration of these general points from the various sources of evidence. The emphasis is on discussing the changes and continuities, which were seen over the period and how these are reflected in workers' vocabulary and rhetoric. These longitudinal findings at LockCo are then compared with the views of workers as part of the comparative study at KeyCo. Finally, a summary of the findings is made.

Who are 'They'?

Here, 'They' refers to managers within the company. It is to be acknowledged that 'company' and 'management' or 'managers' were often used synonymously throughout the interviews, concealing the possible differentiation that employees make between the different levels of management and covering up who they are specifically referring to when they talk about 'the company'. My main interest was in focusing on the two categories within 'them and us' and so the emphasis has not been on deconstructing the terms which would overcomplicate both the discussion process at interviews and the overall analysis. On the other hand, my use of the terms reflects their own discourse where these terms are used synonymously, and so is genuinely 'ethnographic' and does not reflect the imposition of false limits or parameters. Managers are seen as representatives of the company, and when employees talked about 'the company', it was managers, directors and owners that were being referred to. Moreover, while workers may be referring to a particular level of management, or a particular manager on occasion, there are cases when workers may have a generalised conception of 'management', reflecting the need to 'unpack' the concept of 'them and us' as discussed in Chapter Two. I have tried to indicate where possible, the specific level of management which people were referring to. Therefore, it is useful to outline the different levels of management within the organisational structure of the companies which employees are familiar with. This also reflects the earlier studies where interview questions distinguished between junior, middle and senior levels of management (Ackers and Black, 1992, See Appendix 1a).

At LockCo, the same traditional hierarchy has existed for decades. The hierarchy of management begins with the lower or junior level consisting of the charge hands and

foremen. There is some physical means of distinguishing between management levels on the shopfloor, for example, charge hands wear brown coats and foremen wear blue coats with a red collar. In 1987, ninety percent of foremen supervisors had been promoted from the shop floor (Ackers, 1988); a tradition which continues today. For this reason, the line between shopfloor and management is more blurred at this lower level, indeed there is evidence in the discourse of employees over the whole period, that charge hands and foremen are not considered to be real management positions. In 1983, one man remarked, "I don't class a charge hand as management" while in 1996 foremen commented on the difficulties of identity that they felt in their relations with the shopfloor. One foreman remarked that while he was a staff member, he still felt that, "we are definitely workers", while another felt that being a foreman led to a decline in the social contact he had on the shopfloor, because while he was still a shopfloor worker, he had responsibility for other workers. There is then a middle management layer consisting of supervisors and superintendents. They are distinguished on the shopfloor, more traditionally by the wearing of a suit or more recently, by their short blue coats. In 1987, two-thirds of supervisors and virtually all superintendents had been promoted from the shopfloor. The Assistant Managing Director in 1987 stated that this tradition was on the decline, with more managers being brought in from outside of the company (Ackers, 1988) and indeed since the merging of LockCo and KeyCo there has been a situation of general de-layering, with the proposed eventual abolition of the supervisory positions. Finally, there is a higher level, involving departmental managers and directors. Looking back to the pre 1965 period, these senior positions were held by family members, or people who had worked in the industry for many years. Even up to just before the take-over in 1997, the Managing Director had a long history within the company, having worked in the time-study department in his early career. However, more generally, since the late 1960s,

there has been an increase in the number of senior managers recruited from outside of the industry, and this has increased dramatically since the take-over. Since the take-over, all the directors have been replaced with people from outside of the industry and only two senior management positions are held by people who have worked their way 'through the ranks'.

At KeyCo, the traditional hierarchy has changed significantly as part of the restructuring process. At lower levels, the traditional charge hand and foreman positions have been abolished. Now, each team or cell has an appointed team leader or 'Grade Two', all of whom are promoted from the shopfloor. They are not distinguished by their clothing on the shopfloor. At middle level, there was a complete rationalisation of the existing structure in the early 1990s, with twenty-six middle managers losing their jobs. There is now a group of line managers, mostly new to the job, although the majority have been promoted from the shopfloor. They are distinguishable by their long coats. At senior level, there has been an almost total change of departmental managers and directors. As the Personnel Director in 1996 stated, "every senior vacancy that occurred, we went outside to fill, with the objective that bringing in business management expertise rather than lock expertise..... We changed I suspect about half the managers".

Some directors were retained within the new company structure, but not at director level, (an example included the Financial Director who was demoted to Chief Accountant). There has been an attempt to instil a feeling of 'single status' in the company where following the example of Directors in the 'Operations Team', senior managers have been instructed to wear company coats over their suits when on the shopfloor.

Views from the Shopfloor at LockCo

General view of the management/employee relationship

In this section I attempt to present the general orientation of workers' views to management across the period. Significant aspects of this orientation which are highlighted are; views of the level of contact and accessibility, the vocabulary of 'them and us', and the decline of family paternalism. There is then some general discussion of the extent to which there is a commonality of interest between management and workers and the level of trust felt to exist between these two 'corners' of the employment relationship 'triangle' (See Chapter One).

The general opinion of management from workers in 1996 was negative. Very few were positive about managers, and any positive remarks about management tended to be very toned down, with most stating that managers were "all right", or "okay". The most expanded and vocal comments came from those who had negative things to say about their managers (these are discussed in greater detail in the following sections). There is some change from 1983, when about half the wider group had positive things to say about their managers, such as one assembly worker who stated, "I say they're all right really, you can't really say anything bad about them", while another commented, 'I think they're good management. You can't fault them really'. Comments in 1983 focused around the feeling that the general abilities of managers to do their jobs had changed for the better, "I think they've got more respect now, they get a lot more done". In addition, there was a feeling that managers now gained promotion based on merit rather than due to long service, which had happened in the past. Thus, the general orientation towards management became more negative over the period.

In relation to the earlier discussion about which level of management, people were referring to, it is interesting to note that in 1983, interviewees were referring more often

than not, to lower levels of management, particularly with regard to their favourable comments. In contrast, in 1996, when asked to give their overall impressions of management, employees tended to talk about higher levels of management. Perhaps this could reflect the view that the lower level of charge hands and foremen are not really considered as managers relating to the feelings of isolation noted by charge hands themselves, which was discussed earlier. Another explanation could lie in the negativity of views, indeed those who spoke negatively about management in 1983, were concerned with levels at least above charge hand. This involved dissatisfaction with the lack of strategy that managers seemed to have for the future of the company, with one man extending his discussion to that of British management in general. In other words, when asked to comment about managers, people generally had more negative things to say, and as it was the higher levels of managers who were viewed more negatively than lower levels, the higher levels tended to dominate their discussion.

Noting that the general orientation towards management was negative, it has been possible to group the attitudes around various aspects of dissatisfaction which are discussed in the following sections.

Contact and Accessibility

One of the main criteria on which managers were judged (indicated by the discussion in interviews) was the issue of contact, accessibility and communication. Comparison over the whole period 1983-1997 finds that views of the level of contact with management were similar and demonstrated members' overall feelings of disappointment. However, this disappointment has intensified. Relations with junior levels of management have deteriorated over the period in the view of employees. In 1996, few felt that they had much contact even with lower levels of management while over half of the re-interview

group in 1983 had reported that they had some contact with junior levels of management. There is also a feeling apparent over the whole period of a feeling of distance and separation between employees and top management. Most in 1996 stated that they had little or no contact with managers above superintendent level, reflected in comments such as, "you say good morning to them and things like that, but you don't sort of have conversations really", while some commented specifically that there was a feeling of separation and distance between managers and employees, reflective of an overall feeling of 'them and us' discussed later in this section. The situation of the lack of contact between employees and top management had also increased. In general, the impression is that there was little contact between employees and managers, especially at top level, where any contact is fleeting and superficial, for example, "Sometimes you get the odd handshake at Christmas and that's it for the year. Very superficial".

People in 1996 also mentioned the lack of satisfactory consultation that occurred between management and employees. As one man commented, "there's a lack of consultation, and they bring things out where we haven't been consulted, especially in the technology area". Another stated that management did not consider it necessary to consult with employees: "It's sadly lacking because they think the work force is stupid and dumb". Another worker commented that the consultation that did exist was delayed and mainly consisted of management "passing the buck". Many stated that there was no consultation at all, at least in a way that allowed employees to have some kind of input. Management were seen as presenting them with a fait accompli about major decisions, "very often, although they explain it and say 'that's what we're doing', they move people into jobs whether they like it or not". Similarly, one man commented on the futility of asking management questions about decisions, "No, well all as we'd get would be 'that's the way things are'. One worker mentioned his problems of trying to

get to talk to a manager about problems he was experiencing with the merit rise, "...I was being fobbed off continuously. Well they was passing the buck along all the while and you knew that you couldn't break into why, or what's going on, because I think if you created any kind of stir, they'd just say 'There's no reason' and that's the end of that".

With respect to the feeling that the employee-management relationship had deteriorated, were views that the relationship between managers and employees had become more formalised over the years. As one man said in 1996, "You have to go through the right channels now... I mean I could be sitting next to a manager.. and all I'd have to do was tell him what I wanted to tell him, but you know, now it's tended to be a lot more formal". Another added, "The relationship between management and employees had become more fragmented, there'd been more managerial positions made. I mean in the older days, the manager used to do many different occupations but later on there was personnel manager, with a staff which meant that there had to be an assistant personnel manager, and it progressed". This was seen as a particular problem for the shop stewards who felt that the personal relationships had declined, where they could just knock on a manager's door and deal with a problem, whereas now, more had to be put on paper and proper procedure had to be followed. As one ex-steward remarked, "the shop steward should have the right.. to go straight to Personnel and start talking now there's more failures to agree have to be registered to get anywhere, even on small things you'd never heard of them before.. because it would nearly always be sorted out but now management won't talk to you". This was a development that was also mentioned by some employees in 1983, with one female shop steward commenting, "Before it was a family, you knew the top men more because they came onto the shopfloor now you have to go through a procedure" (Ackers, 1988). The increasing formality and distance of the relationship was seen as a clear impediment to 'getting things done'. More serious perhaps was the vehement feeling from a few in 1996, of the vindictiveness of some of the present managers. This had not been voiced at all in 1983. One example

was of a manager and his relationship with a supervisor, which caused the worker's eyes to fill with tears as he spoke,

"you have got some nasty vindictive awful people in senior positions I'm afraid..... There was a supervisor in that department, a nice bloke, he had a disabled son. This manager used to come into his office everyday and everything was world war three. Every little problem he would bang it on the desk. Any way the supervisor died of an heart attack, and a fortnight before he died this manager insisted that he went on an adventure training course and because of the type of person that he was he did.... When he died.. I swear the manager never set foot in that department. But before he died he was in there all the time on the man's back. So if you ask a lot of people it's not a very nice place to work at the moment."

'Them and Us' Attitude

Thus, overall, the discourse suggests that there was a general view of separation in terms of contact, between the shopfloor and management. A vocabulary of 'them and us' and views of a degree of separation between managers and employees were apparent in both 1996 and 1983, but there does appear to be an increase in such feelings across the period. The majority of the re-interview group in 1996 felt this way, with the shared repertoire being particularly striking as the following comments indicate:

".. there's a definite gulf between the top and the work force, it's like a them and us situation.. and they seem to want to keep it in that vein",

"I think they're stuck up really. I mean it takes them all their time ... just to say a word of 'Good Morning', they just look as if to say 'You're lower down than what I am'".

"It's them and us, that's all it is. If they want favours doing, they're all smiles and when everything running right and you want a favour doing, they don't want to know. You know you can take a chap off the Shop floor and put him in a suit and his attitude turns straight away. ",

"Management are different to us you know, we're the workers, you do what they tell you to do, so they're above you. It's like when you were at school really, you've got the teachers and the kids, you know".

One employee stated that he believed it was frowned upon by top managers for employees to talk to managers about issues and that any contact you did have was always filled with suspicion about the motives of the managers, "By and large, you get on with them okay but there's always this looking at suspiciously at what they're doing, because you're always looking for.. that they're after something, that there's a sting in the tail". This can be compared with the similar vocabulary from the group of re-interviewees in 1983, "it's them and us really isn't it? It will always be them and us really, you know, you sort of look up to them and they sort of look down on you", and, "their attitude was, we are managers, and you are work people and will do as you're told more or less".

Other areas of discussion in the interviews gave extra information about the way in which employees viewed the relative positions of themselves and managers within the company. When asked to state which description out of a list (See interview agenda in Appendix 1a), they thought applied to their company, more people of the re-interview group stated that 'Them and Us, Management against Employees' was a fitting description than any other. Here, this complements the general feeling of a separation between employees and management, and a vocabulary of 'them and us'. Indeed there did not appear to be a sense of shared identity as a company. Most of the re-interview group of employees in 1996 stated that they did not feel that they shared a sense of identity with other employees in their organisation and were unequivocal in their view that the company does not work as a team.

Shared Goals

Linked to the last analysis, people were asked to comment on whether they thought that management shared some of the goals of people on the shop floor. Here, I was trying to further examine views of the overall relationship between managers and employees and

triangulate the views received by questions elsewhere in the interviews. Did employees feel that there was a complete separation between themselves and management with regard to their world views, dealing with objectives and goals, or were there some aspects of shared interests? This links to the discussions about the traditional analysis of the employment relationship as 'them and us' (see Chapter Two).

Most people stated that management did not share the same goals as people on the shop floor. There is some change apparent here from 1983 where views were more evenly split in response to the same question. With regard to the nature of shared goals between management and employees, there was some consistency over the period. It is important at this point to note that it is recognised that employees often tended to equate their views of 'shared goals' with that of 'common interest'. In some respects, this is a problem inherent in the question where I did not offer a clear definition of 'shared goals'. On the one hand, it could relate to shared life goals, common viewpoints in such things as life ambitions and shared world views. On the other hand, it could relate to a feeling of 'common interest', perhaps largely temporary. It is the second definition that appeared to fit more with the discourse of those people in 1996 who linked the idea of 'shared goals' with the issue of profit necessary for company survival, and the security of their jobs. Comments included, "At the end of the day if we don't do the work we don't get paid. If they don't get the orders they can't pay us. So at the end of the day you do aim for the same things.", while another also referred to money when they stated, "Everybody wants the company to do well, even those who have just come into the company. I mean because [LockCo] is [Locktown], we need it to survive". These comments were similar to those in 1983, where a view that workers and management had to work together for the shared goal of the success of the company was espoused, as one man remarked, "After all's said and done, it's

their bread and butter the same as anybody else", while another added similarly, "let's face it, they're the same as us aren't they.. if we weren't working then they wouldn't be in a job would they?".

Most of those in 1996 who felt that management and employees did not share goals explained this by stating that management were only interested in profit, and they seemed very resentful that they were never rewarded for the profit that they helped produce. A paint shop worker commented, "you've just got your snouts in the trough. As long as there's plenty for them, they'll keep on taking it and sod you. They try to squeeze you all the time instead of putting a reward where a reward is necessary". A different worker added, "they are here to keep this company going... and make as much profit for themselves as they possibly can, line their pockets... it's all about profit, profit, profit". Another remarked similarly, "I think some of the benefits or conditions we enjoy, are not put there by the management, for the sole purpose of us, because of feeling generous, or sympathetic, they're here to make money, that's the overriding situation, course if they don't none of us would have a job. They have to keep investors and share holders happy". The same vocabulary was demonstrated in 1983 such as, "I think it's a vast difference. The main interest of the people on the shopfloor now and from the trade union's point of view is to maintain their livelihood, to keep their jobs... I think the senior objectives, long term objectives is to produce the same amount of locks with less people... to slim down the workforce because what they are interested in really is maintaining their share of the cake". Another added, "Now first of all they come to work for the money the same as us, so they want to do as good as they can. Now I don't know whether these are on bonuses, I suppose they've got shares in it, like preference shares, so whatever they do is for their benefit and yet whatever we do is also for their benefit. All we do is produce it so that we've got a job at the end. To me it's just a vicious circle for a bloke on the shopfloor. He's got to produce cheaply to keep his job, to produce again/you know what I mean, on a treadmill like".

While there seemed to be a recognition that the company needed to make profit to survive and to keep them in a job, there was also general feeling of inequity with regard to rewards and the sharing of that profit, and the concern that management have for the

welfare of the workforce. A shop steward in 1996 summed this up when he pointed out the difference between the viewpoints of management and employees, "I think as individuals you may have the same sort of goal. But the goal of management is entirely production, profitability. Whereas the goal of the union is production, profitability plus social care of people."

Views of the separation between the goals and objectives of management and employees have remained fairly consistent over the period. In some cases, this divergence of goals was seen to reflect the distance between them in terms of contact, as one assembly worker pointed out that commonality of goals was difficult when, "They just keep themselves to themselves, whereas they should be trying to make it a happy family". Similarly, in 1983, this view was shared by a toolmaker who commented, "I don't think there's any common ground at all really. There should be and ideally there would be but I think generally management's attitude prevents a real we're all in this together and pull together attitude... I think this would be more available if there were more discussions and more worker involvement in the real aims of the company and if it were a sort of real discussion". Another employee specifically alluded to the notion of 'them and us', stating that they could not share goals because they were at different social levels: "Everyone's a different social level really and there's them and us ain't there. Your goals are different to the management's goals". While this employee felt that there was a divergence in the interests and goals of management and employees, she did recognise that they shared an ultimate goal of company survival.

This section complements the earlier finding, that while this view was largely shared by people in 1983 also, more employees, and the majority of the re-interview group in 1996 felt there to be an increasing degree of separation between managers and shopfloor workers in terms of contact and communication, and here there is also a view that the ultimate objectives and goals of both parties are also different and separated. The lack of contact and concern for the workforce, which was seen as an unfulfilled expectation of

management, was also apparent in this discussion of management goals, where management's main concern was seen to be profit and self interest, which overshadowed any underlying feelings of shared goals in terms of company survival.

Trust

In the latest interviews, the issue of trust was a subject of discussion, which was not specifically included in the earlier studies. This was in order to add another element in so as to gain a more detailed picture of the management-employee relationship. Employees were asked to describe the level of overall trust that they felt existed between management and the shop floor. Employees were asked to state their opinion on the level of trust which existed and choices of 'excellent', 'good', 'pretty poor' or 'very poor' as responses were offered if people had difficulty in making an assessment. The level of trust that people felt existed between management and employees was generally low. Nobody felt the trust between employees and management was 'excellent'. Most saw the level of trust as 'pretty poor' or 'very poor'. As they commented further, "Pretty poor really. Well it's like being in Featherstone really isn't it. You know cameras at doors, always checking people.", while another added, "At the moment there isn't any trust. We don't trust them and they certainly don't trust us". Other remarks included, "You have got to be joking. I wouldn't trust any of them as far as I could throw them". One assembly worker was not able to give a specific opinion, although her answer does allude to a negative view of the trust situation as she stated: "I can't answer, trust... I don't know if there is any". One man who commented further related his lack of trust in the company to a recent dispute with the company over a tightening up of sick pay regulations and his experiences of colleagues who had retired through sickness and not received full pension benefits.

The majority of the group in 1996 stated that the level of trust had declined since they had began working at the company, with those who commented further, explaining the decline in similar terms to other views about the management-employee relationship including, the take over by the electronics multi-national, lack of management contact with employees and job cutting. The working relationship between workers and management was seen to be more based on trust before the multi-national took over. This feeling was reminiscent of the words of the Lock union President in her farewell address in 1977 where she wanted to,

‘thank the people who gave me such a happy industrial life. The marvellous presents I received from so many friends on.. my retirement from Messrs. LockCo, where I have always been treated so well by both managers and fellow workers, which proves that the two ‘sides’ can work together if there is goodwill, a little give and take on both sides of the industrial scene, but most of all trust’ (NULMW, 1977: 3).

The decreasing levels of trust which were felt to exist over the period connects clearly to the next sub-section where views are linked specifically to feelings of the decline of family paternalism.

Decline of Family Paternalism

The separation between shopfloor and management and feelings of ‘them and us’ are perhaps not that surprising at a general level, indeed it is what one might expect in a traditional, Taylorist manufacturing culture. Indeed there was recognition of this by some in 1996. The feelings of ‘them and us’ in the company were seen as an inevitable part of factory life and did not necessarily mean that workers and managers were always in conflict with one another. As one female expediter commented, ‘I don’t think it’s management against employees, it’s just the way it’s always been. I don’t think they’re against we, and they’re only out for themselves or we wouldn’t have got half of what we’ve got, but it’s always been them

and us'. In a similar way, another said, 'I wouldn't say it's them and us, I wouldn't say we was completely dead against each other'. On the other hand, while there were some indications of an acceptance of the status quo, the views of disappointment with the degree of separation are significant within the specific LockCo context, with its traditions of a family-based, paternalistic management style. Company directors were traditionally on first name terms with the workforce, indeed at the union industrial symposium¹⁸ there was a female assembly line worker who called the Managing Director by his first name when she addressed him because she had known him since he was a small boy. Employees frequently spoke nostalgically about the personal contact they had experienced with managers in the past. The group in 1996 was asked if they thought over the last ten years that management had altered its way of dealing with employees.

Some saw the deterioration as linked to the loss of personal contact with management, with people commenting specifically about the aloofness of managers: 'They haven't got so much consideration for you, you're just there to do a job'; 'They've become a lot more strict.. you have to go through the right channels.. you can't sort of approach a manager'; "They've gone away from us more, there's an aloofness now", and finally; '..They've gone a lot more colder towards people, a couldn't care less attitude has crept in.. they aren't bothered as long as they're making enough money to pay off the share holders'. This was compared to their experience of past managers when they joined the company. As one woman stated, 'top management don't talk to people whereas they used to when I started here, it was more like a family', while another added, 'When I first started you had your own directors and they used to come round and say good morning to you. They knew your name but all that's gone now. You rarely see anybody'. Some commented about their memories of the

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Industrial symposium to discuss Foreign Imports, held at Union headquarters, March 1996.

old family managers and their caring attitude towards the employees, 'At one time they were a bit more lenient.. I can remember at one time, a girl went up and went part time because she had to look after her Dad... and they let her go part time, but I can't see them even considering that now... ', while another remarked, 'I mean under the LockCo regime, the brothers, I know one or two people who've been stuck financially and they've spoken to them and they helped them out. This lot wouldn't, they wouldn't even throw you a life belt if you was drowning.'. Similar comments were made by one retiree, 'well when I went there first, there was two LockCo brothers, ... but they were a very paternal people. I wouldn't say that the wages were the highest or anything like that but if you had any difficulties, financial or family, they'd help you out if you went to see them, they really would, even though it was a fair sized company, they really would help people out.'

Likewise, in 1983, even before the take-over by the electronics company, half the group felt that there had been a deterioration in the relationship since they had worked at the company, particularly since the company merged with the neighbouring security firm in 1965. Many commented on the different attitude of the family managers which they had experienced in their early days of employment at LockCo, for example: 'the two [LockCo] brothers, the last ones, philanthropists if you like, they were very caring, the sort of people that really did care for the workers and did everything they possibly could for LockCo.. But that all disappeared when [the company] took over [in 1965]..... it's a multi-national creaming off everything that's good about it'.

Employees in 1996 also commented on the decline of company involvement in the local community, another characteristic of classical paternalism (Ackers, 1998). Only three people related some company involvement in the community, with most remarking that while the company used to have a lot of involvement, this had died out since they had begun working at LockCo. People related this in a similar way to their nostalgia about contact with managers: 'We had a sports facility, football, bowls, tennis, good repartee with the management and everything. It's all gone. The sports fields gone, the bowling has gone, the tennis has gone, everything has gone. I think that sort of thing keeps a company together. They used to have

two/three football teams here, they have a job to find one now. Because they ain't got the heart in the company, in my opinion. This ain't the company I started at 40 years ago. Its like an alien to me now'.

Two other workers agreed, 'they have downgraded and not invested in the social part of the company at all. The sports club has never been improved, in fact it's closed down. The internal sports facilities and teams have been run down.' and, 'The employer tended to drop out of that sort of thing, the sports and all that, they're not interested in that side of things'. The decline of the company's involvement is also reflected in workers' recent experience during the period of fieldwork. The proposed closure of the LockCo Social Club was an issue raised at a shop steward's committee meeting ¹⁹. The Social Club had as long a history as the company, providing a place on the factory site where employees could meet socially and providing facilities for a wide variety of sports. Indeed, the original company handbook had prided itself on the company sports teams. This was held up as another sign of the lack of company concern with the welfare of the workforce and there was support from the committee for a campaign to save the club. However, the closure did proceed and the club premises are now only used to hold union meetings in. In a similar way, the company also announced the closing of the Locks Welfare Society ²⁰ which had existed for eighty years and was a prime example of a paternalistic organisation. With company administrative support, it was run by a joint committee of managers and workers and funded by a weekly payment by members from their wages. Its role was to provide financial assistance to members in cases of illness and various social functions such as annual parties for retirees. The union has since taken over the administrative running of the society from the company. Similarly, there has been a lapsing of the Long Service Dinners over the period when

¹⁹Shop Steward's Committee Meeting, 19th July 1995.

²⁰Meeting with the convenor 13th November 1997

they had been held up as a major event of the company's calendar. The commemorative booklet for the dinner in December 1982 notes that 160 people attended, of whom 37 people were celebrating over 40 years service, 75 were celebrating over 30 years service and 78 had been at the firm over 25 years. This was an impressive account of the many years people had spent at the firm and which appears to have died out by 1996, even though there are still many long service employees. Overall, there has been a significant decline in the level of company involvement over the period.

The majority of the re-interview group commented that the relationship had deteriorated, however there is less consensus about the cause of that deterioration. A large minority commented that the level of personal contact had declined since the first take-over by the electronics multi-national in 1984, as they commented, 'There used to be a time when... take for example Christmas... you always used to get a director.. walk through the factory, shake hands and there was definite contact... more of a family concern, a family company if you like, but that's gone now..... when [the multi-national] became involved you could definitely see a change in the people in authority'. Another added, '... there's an aloofness now where top management don't talk to people. They used to when I started here, it was more like a family... that's due to [the multi-national] taking over.. being in electronics, it's more so they couldn't really care less.. the family atmosphere is gone'. Others who highlighted a decline in the relationship dated it as having occurred over the last three years; with one person commenting that the decline had come more recently, with management becoming tougher over the last three years as the competition in the market had increased and the level of unemployment had made managers less bothered about employees. Finally, one person felt that the relationship had declined since the Conservative government took over in 1979.

It is interesting to note that people over the whole period of research commented on the decline of the family atmosphere of the company and the paternalistic style of

management. However, as Ackers noted (1988: 64), the longer term erosion of paternalism is often conflated by people with recent critical events. Most employees related the decline to the most recent take-over and the changes associated with it. In 1983, the merger with another lock company in 1965 was seen as a turning point, whereas in 1996, most people saw the take-over in 1984 as a critical incident. It is therefore difficult to get a hold on the real time scale of the changes and to assess the impact of these critical events. However, there is consistency in views about the general direction of change; characteristics of the family management style in place when they had first joined the company and views of an overall deterioration of the relationship.

Summary

Feelings towards managers in both 1983 and 1996 were negative and employees based their judgements of managers on similar criteria, using similar vocabulary. A vocabulary of 'them and us' was apparent in the discourse of employees in both 1983 and 1996, but looking across the period, this negativity has increased. The discourse now suggests that employees felt that managers and shopfloor had become increasingly distanced, in terms of contact and accessibility, and in terms of goals and objectives, where management were seen to have less concern for the welfare of the workforce. The level of trust between employees and managers was very low in 1996. Finally, workers across the period, compare management with their past experience. They lament the loss of the family management style which had characterised the firm when they had first joined to a larger degree than those in 1983. The concluding chapter draws out explanations for these attitudes within a discussion of implications of the dismantling of a traditional paternalistic management style. Thus, this section of findings presents evidence based around the two comparisons; firstly, the idea of the influence of change across the

period, but secondly, also begins to look at the specific influence of current management organisation and policies in terms of how employee perceptions of commitment and trust are affected. The latter will be discussed further in the next section looking at the findings at KeyCo.

Legitimacy of the Role of Management

Here a connection can be made with the literature about the psychological contract and exchange relationship that exists between an organisation and its members (See Chapter Two). Employee views about this exchange relationship can provide a framework for attitudes towards management. It is thus important to get some understanding of members' expectations of their managers and how this matches their experience of the relationship in the workplace. Employees in 1996 were asked to discuss what they saw as the role of a manager, or what they thought a manager should do as part of their job. This is then compared with how they felt that their experience of management matched up to these expectations.

Expectations: Managerial 'know-how'

Most of the re-interview group in 1996/7 stated that managers should be concerned with what I have termed 'production issues' such as ensuring output, getting orders for products and ensuring the efficient organisation of the factory. Looking more generally at the content of the interviews, there is little evidence for change over the period with regard to what most people saw as part of management's job. Indeed, most of the re-interview group in 1983 also felt that managers should be involved with production issues such as organising work and orders efficiently, and ensuring output. As one man

commented, 'Well basically I think that the management's basic role is to get as much production as possible for the least expenditure as possible'.

This included views that a manager should 'manage properly' with one person expanding to state that their view of the present management was that they did not manage properly because of their lack of experience in the lock industry, which the interview discourse suggests links to views of a decline in the promotion of managers from the shopfloor. Looking over the whole period, a substantial minority in 1983, commented positively about lower managers being promoted from the shop floor. As two shop stewards remarked, 'A lot of the foremen started labouring, so they've worked themselves up so they know what the shop floor like, they know what you have to do and how to work', and, 'I think it's important that they do do that, to know, to be aware'. Higher levels of management were felt to be disadvantaged and to lose the respect of employees if they had not been promoted through the ranks, as one paint shop worker commented, 'I think it's a good thing myself to have a working charge hand... some of them just don't know what they're doing sort of thing, you think well how's he got as superintendent you know, because superintendents are supposed to know most of everything on the shop..... I should think they should work their way off the Shop floor more or less to a certain part of management anyway'. Another worker added similarly, 'A lot of the foremen started labouring.... but I think some of the higher management, I don't think they really know what goes on'. This issue about managers working up through the ranks from the shopfloor was also a point of discussion in the 1987 (Ackers, 1988: 74). However, it did not seem to be so much of a concern in 1996. Indeed only two people commented about the desirability of managers having worked up from the shopfloor, and they shared similar viewpoints to those in 1983. As one man commented, 'Many years ago you had people walking around that had come off the shop floor and knew what you was talking about. I mean you talk to some of these people and they don't even know what you're going on about.. they're employing people who really are accountants'.

The rest of the group were noticeably silent on this issue. Perhaps this reflects the overall decline of the trend over the 1990s, where employees have become used to managers being appointed from outside of the industry, and so this issue has declined in importance in their expectations of managers. One might consider that it has become a norm that has fitted in with the general decline of paternalistic tradition within the firm. In addition, the situation at LockCo up until the take-over in 1997 was of stability in management personnel whereas in 1987, the company had recently been taken over. One might expect that the issue of management being recruited from outside of the company might be a more prominent issue if employees were interviewed once the impact of the new take-over has taken hold (Note that this is prominent issue in the discourse of employees at KeyCo where the multi-national has overseen a complete change of management personnel. See further discussion later in this section).

Expectations: Contact and Communication

Any differences in attitude between the early 1980s and the late 1990s, related to an assessment by workers of the need for managers to increase the level of contact and accessibility that they have with employees. Many in 1996 thought that a manager should be down on the shop floor getting to know the employees rather than 'being stuck up their offices'. There was a widely held opinion that managers should make more of an effort to speak to employees on the shop floor. One assembler remarked, 'I think they should come down a little more yes. I think if you've got a good atmosphere you work better don't you, I think you do anyway, even if all they say to you is hello, at least it's sommat ain't it'. This links to discussions in the last sub-section about the disappointment voiced by workers with regard to the deterioration in the level of contact. Complementing the majority view of the need for increased contact are those who felt that a manager should look after

employee interests and help ensure that employees were happy in their jobs. As one shop steward stated, 'what management should do is to make sure the company is successful and is profitable. But what it should also do is try to do the best for the employees that work for them and give them the opportunity to improve themselves'. This was not an expectation raised by most in 1983, indeed, only one person offered other expectations of management's job besides 'production issues', which likewise did involve a feeling that managers should have a concern for the welfare of the workforce. Perhaps this can relate to the generally more unfavourable views of managers over the period and the feelings that relations between managers and employees had worsened. People tended to outline expectations of management that are not fulfilled. Thus in 1996, the increasing deterioration in the level of contact and further decline of the family-feel, caring management, has seen this highlighted as a missing component of a manager's job.

Experience

In order to compare expectations against workers' experiences of the existing managerial job, the re-interview group was asked to state which out of a list of possible job components formed part of the job of a manager at LockCo (See interview agenda in Appendix 1a). This links to the discussion of the 'psychological contract', and what informs workers' views and perceptions, relating to specific area of inquiry D. Of the two main expectations outlined in 1996 (and discussed in the last two sub-sections), an ability to ensure the output of product was clearly seen as a role of management by almost all of the group and so managers were generally fulfilling expectations in this area of 'production issues'. However, complementing the view of a need for increased contact, very few felt that managers were concerned with employee welfare and making sure that employees were happy at work. People did not feel that managers were

concerned whether employees were happy in their jobs or at work, indeed one worker commented that ensuring that employees were happy used to be part of a manager's job, with the deterioration in the level of contact being seen as a primary reason for the change, 'Well as they don't show their face to find out... they don't bother to come and find out if you are [happy]'. This is an important point because workers did feel that the basic welfare of the workforce with regard to conditions at work were seen as being a concern of management, (indeed only one person did not think that part of a manager's job was to ensure that conditions were safe, and the general view was that management were also concerned to ensure that conditions were comfortable). The discourse indicates however that what was lacking are the intangible aspects of the employee/management relationship; the personal contact and friendly atmosphere which they felt had characterised the company in the past.

Summary

Again, the influence of change, and impact of environmental and workplace-level contextual change can be addressed. Across the period, the expectations of what a manager should do in LockCo have changed somewhat to include a specifically voiced need for personal contact with employees, and a concern for the welfare of the workforce. This view was shared by the union, as the convenor pointed out ²¹, 'It shouldn't only be about wages, it should be benefits. Pensions, medical care, recognition of the social role at work, social events, responsibility in terms of trust they need to develop an honest relationship, but this is limited by the 'them and us' attitude'. While issues around the psychological contract were not investigated directly in 1983, the discourse indicates that those expectations voiced then, namely, of 'looking after production', were met by management. In 1996

²¹ Meeting with the LockCo convenor 10th December 1997

however, expectations in terms of contact are not met and so one could hypothesise that the psychological contract between employees and managers was seen in different terms and was perhaps less fulfilled. There is a clear view of the roles that management should play, and this is discussed specifically within a framework of the “drama of negotiation” in Chapter Five. Bearing in mind the view that this is a reciprocal contract, one might anticipate that levels of commitment to the company and to managers would be weakened (which links to the ‘dual commitment’ literature and to ‘specific area of inquiry’ C); some examples of which are discussed in the following sections.

Identities

As outlined in Chapter Three, questions were asked in 1996 that related specifically to the conventional way in which the issue of ‘dual commitment’ has been researched, drawing on some elements of Sherer and Morishima's (1989) questionnaire design. Here, there appears to be ambivalence with regard to company commitment. Despite the overall negativity towards the representatives of the company, there was an underlying positivity and almost affection towards the company. The majority of the group agreed that they would put in extra effort for the company if necessary, and employees related times when they had stayed behind at weekends to get a certain order out. As one female machinist remarked, ‘I know if they need that order, I’ll do my best for them’, while a tool maker related to a sense of community about the company when he stated, ‘I would go out of my way because my job’s on the line... not only my job, but for the future, kids coming along’. The larger proportion of the group also stated that they continued to feel a sense of loyalty to the company, although some related that this had declined since the early 1980s. As one worker remarked, ‘We were taken over.. and that’s when the uphill battle really began. They seemed a firm that didn’t know what they’d taken on, they seemed to destroy people’s loyalty to the firm really’.

The view that there had been a decline in the level of company loyalty was more noticeable in 1996 than in 1983. What was particularly evident from workers' discussions was a degree of underlying affectionate feeling for the firm. In reference to their nostalgic view about the old management style (See earlier discussion), people seemed genuinely unhappy that the place did not hold the same atmosphere any longer. One man ruefully remarked that the company 'It's like an alien to me now'. It is not surprising that people felt similarly bearing in mind the fact that many people had invested most of their adult lives in LockCo. In fact, given the vulnerability of their situation as employees, the uncomfortable conditions, gruelling pace of work and deterioration in company atmosphere, what is more surprising is how common were feelings that people enjoyed coming to work. For many people, work was a sociable place, as one machinist commented 'I got into a crowd and they made me feel that welcome, and you sit in a group sort of thing, and we had that many laughs and that much fun, it weren't like coming to work, it was a pleasure'. While she felt that the atmosphere had declined over the period, she was still able to state that, 'even though it's only a factory I love my job, I love the work, I love coming to work'. Working at the factory had become a firm part of most employees' lives, indeed talking to one retiree highlighted this point as he felt that there was very little left in his life now that he'd left LockCo. As he commented, 'I miss talking to the chaps, football talk on a Monday morning.. I've really lost the ability to enjoy myself, I really have. I know it sounds funny but I went on holiday and I didn't know what to do, I was bored senseless most of the time. The only thing I really look forward to is a drink down the pub. It's disgraceful'. Despite the deterioration in relations on the shopfloor between managers and workers, there was still a very strong impression that the company was viewed as a community asset and a local social institution. For many people, LockCo was LockTown. This was a view that local press

and union newsletters frequently drew upon, pointing out that the survival of the lock firms was imperative for the survival of the town itself and its local community.

While feelings of loyalty were voiced however, the vocabulary suggested that this was loyalty based on history and tradition rather than on pride in the 1990s. Indeed most of the group agreed that they did not feel a sense of company pride. Perhaps this relates to a the overall feeling that the atmosphere in the company had deteriorated and that LockCo was no longer a place where they enjoyed coming to work. Certainly, people indicated that LockCo was not a company that had retained a sense of commonality . Complementing the earlier viewpoints of the separation between employees and managers and the lack of shared goals, most also stated that they did not share the overall values of the company. Some remarked that while they used to be proud of working for LockCo, this had disappeared over the years. Neither did loyalty correspond to an overriding willingness to remain employed at LockCo, indeed if the opportunity arose, most of the re-interview group agreed that they could work for a different organisation. This attitude is also reflected in worker's aspirations for their children with regard to working at LockCo. Bearing in mind the historical context of the firm, where whole families were employed within the lock industry and where children often followed their parents into the same factory, this trend appears to be on the decline. Many workers were not proud of the work that they did and did not see it as a career they would like their children to have. This trend was explained by the differing aspirations of employees who now 'wanted better' for their children. As one man commented with regard to working in a lock factory, 'I hope it's stopped with me', while another added, 'I wouldn't like them to come onto the shopfloor'. The General Secretary of the union echoed this opinion. While himself, his wife, and his brother had worked in the

lock industry for decades, only one of his children had worked in a lock factory and then for only a short period of time. When they discovered that I had spent all of my career so far at university, after first of all finding it amusing that 'you mean you've never had a proper job?', people often advised me to stick at studying and not to ever work in a factory. As one paint shop worker remarked, 'never get a job with overalls'. There are signs therefore that the family networks within the lock industry are starting to break down. This trend is also demonstrated by the increasing age profile of the work force. A study carried out by a union Executive Committee member illustrated the decline in school-leavers recruited since the early 1980s. Only fifty school leavers had been recruited in the last ten years, with only twenty per cent of these being recruited through the informal family networks ²². This is also a regional trend. Whereas the West Midlands had always fallen behind the national average of school leavers opting to continue their education, the region now appears to be catching up with growth rates of eight percent since 1990, resulting in far fewer school leavers going immediately into employment (West Midlands Labour and Skill Trends 1993/4).

What was most noticeable was the absence of a shared company identity and lack of team ethos. However, this does not represent a fundamental change in attitudes because there has not been a real change in the view of the company as a mass of individuals and sectional interests (Discussed in greater depth in Section Three). While more people recognised a sense of working as a team, it must be remembered that nearly half the employees in 1983 also stated that there was a conflict of interests between individuals. Almost a third of the group stated that they were 'Individuals working for themselves'. Relating to the list of statements (See interview agenda in Appendix 1a) while almost

²²Meeting with KeyCo convenor, February 1996.

half of the wider 1983 group stated that they felt that the company worked as a team, in 1996, only two people shared this view. What appears to have occurred is an augmentation of this attitude over the period, with more people commenting on the 'them and us' situation and lack of company identity. This was certainly seen as having an effect on company loyalty, in that the new company rhetoric of team work did not fit with the traditional paternalistic traditions of the company. As the convenor explained, 'I think there is a lot more trust with the master servant relationship than there is with this illusion of democracy in the workplace through corporate identity. Work is about individuals, not the collective goals of the corporate identity which swallows individuals up'²³.

Summary at LockCo

With regard to perceptions of 'them', the LockCo comparison has allowed a view of change and continuity within attitudes. On one hand, feelings towards managers in both 1983 and 1996 were quite negative. However, looking across the period, this negativity has increased dramatically across all areas. Employees now felt that managers and the shopfloor have become increasingly distanced and they lamented the loss of the family management style which had characterised the firm when they had first joined, much as they did in 1983. Management were seen to fail to meet expectations in terms of contact and communication with a view expressed that the ultimate objectives and goals of both parties had become increasingly separated. There was less company loyalty and pride and less feelings of company identity voiced, with more people commenting on the 'them and us' situation and lack of company identity in 1996 than 1983. However, in general, any changes in opinion were gradual and did not form a sudden break with an earlier pattern of entirely different attitudes. This links to similar findings in the macro-

²³Meeting with LockCo Convenor 3rd March 1998

survey data (as presented in Chapter Two, and as discussed further in Chapter Five) pointing to the continuity in and resilience of many attitudes, within which gradual changes and trends can be identified.

Comparison at KeyCo

In this section, I attempt to present the general orientation of workers' views of management at KeyCo, in order to make a comparison with the foregoing findings from LockCo, looking specifically at the ways differences in managerial organisation and policy impact upon employee attitudes and perceptions. The same issues have been highlighted here; the level of contact and accessibility, vocabulary of 'them and us', shared goals, and the issue of trust. The discussion then turns to comparing employee expectations with their experience of management and issues of the level of identification between employees and management.

General view of the management/employee relationship

Contact and accessibility

The general tone of the negative attitudes towards management at KeyCo was very similar to that at LockCo. In fact, at KeyCo, this negativity was voiced more often and more vehemently with a large majority remarking that managers were 'very bad', 'terrible' or 'pretty bad'. Comments focused around similar issues. KeyCo workers were just as disappointed about the level of contact and communication that they had with their managers as were the workers at LockCo. There appears to be more contact at lower levels, indeed many commented on frequent everyday contact with team leaders and supervisors. However, more people at KeyCo than at LockCo felt that they had little or no contact with higher levels of management. Typical comments included, '..they never come round to see us, they walk around, look at the place and tut and walk off' , and ' management don't bother you at all. Until something goes wrong, they don't know you'. Another added, 'they come in and they don't even introduce themselves.. you should get to know people surely'. People were

particularly disappointed that they had not met the new managing director (who had just joined the company when the interviews were carried out), and were not even sure of his name. The general feeling was that of a separation between shop floor and management, mirroring that at LockCo.

The general sense of a lack of contact and of separation is interesting bearing in mind that many people at KeyCo (unlike those at LockCo), felt that the amount of communication had increased in the last two years. Indeed the rhetoric of the new KeyCo management placed a great emphasis on the need for improved communication between managers and employees. People remarked on the new communication devices that had been introduced such as, team briefings, monthly meetings, and newsletters. However, the discourse did not suggest that the channels which exist for communication between employees and managers are leading to an open culture, indeed very few felt that such meetings were useful or interesting. Most remarked that much information was circulated by rumour and hearsay. One person commented that they heard about developments too late to have any opportunity to contribute. Others commented that while communication channels were in place, employees were not using them properly. An example included the notice boards that were set up on the shop floor illustrating changes to plant layout. Managers then asked employees to sign these notice boards to certify that they understood and were satisfied with the changes that were proposed. One person stated that while employees signed the boards, they did so without really understanding the changes or agreeing with them, as was made clear in private conversations. Workers felt therefore that management was getting a false impression of their agreement to certain changes. In general, most employees were not satisfied with the nature of company communication that existed, because they did not feel they could

contribute, and because they still did not receive a sufficient amount of information. The majority of the group did not see KeyCo as an open organisation and most commented on the lack of freedom that existed to voice their feelings and views to management. The main reason cited for this lack of freedom, was fear and insecurity about their jobs. Many people believed that speaking out would result in severe recriminations by 'being branded a negative thinker'. Instead, people kept their opinions to themselves and only made suggestions in private to other employees, seen in remarks such as, 'after the meetings people come back and say what they think but they won't with management there, they're afraid for their jobs', and, 'if you have a negative attitude, you don't know what kind of impact that has if there are redundancies or something, so I tend to falsely agree with them'.

One example of this was related to me by a number of people including a manager and had almost become like a folk tale on the shopfloor. Parts for machining and assembly are kept in boxes alongside those people working with them. This incident involved a box of springs, which normally would be separated by layers of paper to prevent the springs becoming entwined with each other. However, this made them difficult to handle quickly and so on this occasion, the employee had laid them all out on the bench next to him. When the Operations Director came through the shopfloor, he noticed that these springs were not put away tidily and in an effort to maintain housekeeping discipline had told the employee to put them back in the box. Following these instructions to the letter, this employee threw them all back in the box so that when somebody needed to use some springs, they were all tangled up. When the team leader questioned the employee, he answered that he had simply done what the manager had told him to do. Explanations for this incident varied from being due to a situation where workers do not feel that they can offer suggestions or alternatives to managers, to the fact that the relationship is such that the worker saw this an act of defiance to management, knowing full well that it was the

wrong thing to do. Either way, a lack of communication was demonstrated, and when I asked one of the employees why they felt this incident had arisen, they remarked, 'it's still them and us isn't it'.

'Them and us' Attitude

Thus the communication and contact that exists at KeyCo did not seem to have lessened the feelings of separation between employees and managers. A similar vocabulary of a 'them and us' situation, as at LockCo, could be identified at KeyCo. As one female packer commented, 'They sort of walk around thinking 'I'm it, you're shite'. I mean they don't speak to the people on the shop floor, they totally ignore us'. This feeling was also apparent in views that employees were treated like children by management, 'well you don't treat school kids like they do we. It's like you're in a Borstal or something, the way they come round, their attitude to we..' and, 'they could start treating us like adults instead of children. You can't talk to them like one human being to another'. To complement this, when asked which of the list of statements fitted KeyCo (See interview agenda in Appendix 1b), as at LockCo, many people voiced feelings of 'them and us', and chose the description 'Them and Us, management against employees'. Managers too, recognised the 'them and us' situation which exists and which is felt to stem from the lack of contact and accessibility of some managers. As the production manager stated, 'I still think there's the them and us situation. I think possibly it's not as bad as it was, because we do get out there, we do talk to them but I still think it's there, I still think, I think the fact that all the management are upstairs, and there's a lot of people they never see, that that creates a them and us, it's just the fact that they never bother to come down'

Perhaps some explanation for the failure of the new communication devices (described earlier) to have lessened the separation between shopfloor and management can be attributed to the fact that this was not the objective of managers in introducing the

schemes. The managers themselves were not convinced of the two-way process of involvement between the company and employees. As the Operations Director stated, there was, 'very little leeway for a two way process. The communication process has been very much.. one way..', while the Engineering Manager commented similarly that 'oh absolutely, they are imposed from above.. because at the end of the day, we hope that what we're .. doing are good common sense ideas'. Finally, the Chief Accountant stated, 'It has to be imposed, there has to be a certain degree of contempt but having said that it's good for them, you don't realise what's good for you until it's happened'. Management rhetoric therefore evokes a condescending attitude towards the workforce where their discourse suggests that they have a view that 'they know best'. This is clearly apparent in all management discussions with regard to the changes that have been put in place at KeyCo, and the input that employees should have in this process. While they were happy to communicate with workers, they have made no real effort, or show any real inclination, to consult with the workforce.

Shared Goals

Similar views to those at LockCo were also voiced with regard to the level of shared goals between employees and management. The nature of these shared goals was similarly linked with ideas of the issue of necessary profit for company survival and the security of jobs. Again as at LockCo, more people felt that goals were not shared. There was a similar recognition that while they shared the overall goal of company survival, there was a general feeling of inequity with regard to the sharing of that profit and management concern for the welfare of the workforce. The comments from people were very similar to those at LockCo across the period from 1983-1996, as one tool maker

commented, 'Well the management sort of wants ideally, [is] more out the door for less expense, less workers... Management are all for profit, that's what it's all about these days' ²⁴

Trust

Finally, significant similarity between the two companies was also found with regard to views of the level of trust between management and employees. The overall view was that the level of trust was low, with most people commenting that the amount of trust had declined since they had began working at the company. This depletion of trust was felt to be due to the frequent changes of management personnel and due to the formalisation of the relationship with the decline of the family-oriented personal relations with managers. It is the little incidents that highlighted the lack of trust for workers. One assembler related one such incident. 'In the past, if you worked on a Saturday morning, your treat was to go out and get breakfast. If you were stock taking say, you used to have one person collected all the orders for the shop and went out and got the orders and came back. You were trusted to do that..... that's what it's about, management trusting employees.'

Relating directly to their recent experience, at KeyCo, the assessment of the level of trust was also connected to a view that management were unfair. This view was demonstrated in comments about management choices for promotions to team leader positions on the shopfloor. Many people were unhappy with the promotions that had been made, feeling that the managers who had carried out the interviews for promotions did not have enough experience of the employee's work record, skills and achievements to be able to make fair choices. These employees voiced the opinion that they felt that the level of skill and experience you possessed did not matter as it was more a question of whether the

²⁴Compare this directly with similar comments from LockCo; "it's all about profit, profit, profit", "As long as there's plenty for them, they'll keep on taking it and sod you"... and... "I think the senior objectives.. is to produce the same amount of locks with less people.. because what they're interested in is maintaining their share of the cake".

manager liked you or not. Indeed, most managers had been at KeyCo less than six months, and the factory manager commented that he was launched straight into promotion interviews as soon as he arrived and was apprehensive about the selection process. As many people felt, 'so you had to go through this fiasco of being interviewed by someone who knew nothing about you at all. I mean you could have sat there and told them a pack of lies basically'. One might have expected that those who had been turned down for promotions would have felt unhappy about the choices which had been made, however, similar comments were also made by the new team leaders themselves. As one remarked, 'There's a points system.. and I had nineteen which I couldn't understand because I hadn't been here that long.. perhaps they liked me or something'. Another added in a similar vein, 'he hadn't been there long enough to understand what people were like, he just went on what people said, not what they could do.. that's probably why I got the grade two'. These team leaders almost seemed embarrassed that they had got the job and had to make excuses for the decision. Overall then, opinions from the shopfloor that there was a low level of trust between workers and managers was seen to derive from their experience of managers who were seen to act increasingly unfairly and arbitrarily over the period.

Decline of family paternalism

The longitudinal information that was so useful for LockCo, was not available here for KeyCo, so I have to rely only on retrospective comments which indicate the historical context in which current perceptions are grounded. At KeyCo, similarly nostalgic views of past managers were voiced as at LockCo, based around past memories of the increased personal contact with family management and their caring attitude towards the workforce. As one worker related, 'years ago with the old management they'd come down on the shop floor and have a chat with you, have a laugh and a joke, but not now, no, all that's gone'. Others commented similarly, 'Well at one time, if the gaffer come in, he'd walk round, say hello, shake your

hand. These, they don't say a bloody word to you, you're just a number, it's worse than working in a concentration camp'. and, '..managers always used to come around, walk through the shop, the old MD used to start at one end and walk through the shop every morning'. As at LockCo then, the deterioration in the relationship between management and shopfloor was felt to derive from the loss of personal contact.

In a complementary way, and in parallel to views at LockCo, KeyCo employees also lamented the decline of company involvement in the local community. More people at KeyCo commented that there was some kind of continuing company involvement outside of the workplace than at LockCo. However, this was largely spoken about in a derogatory way, and certainly was not seen to reflect a maintenance of the traditional company involvement of the past. One aspect of involvement that was mentioned frequently was that of the KeyCo Social Club. However, employees felt that this involvement did not benefit them as the majority of club members were not KeyCo employees. In fact, by 1996, the company did not even have a management role in the club and was connected by name only. People also remarked that the company had sponsored a yacht trip around the world, but were unhappy as it involved someone connected to the Managing Director's family. Common remarks included, 'they were sponsoring this boat for some relation of one of the directors... for I don't know twenty thousand pounds, and then there's no money.... for the workers', and, 'They're sponsoring her for so much money and then they stop money out of our pay packets'.

The discourse suggests that any involvement that still existed therefore, only served to highlight the lack of perks and goodwill given to employees by management. Company involvement was not seen to reflect the caring involvement of the past where employees remembered the annual work's dance, children's Christmas parties, company sports

teams, pensioner's events and 'Christmas boxes'. One man was particularly disappointed that management refused to support and sponsor a KeyCo football team when he had made a proposal in 1995. He felt that they were missing out on any company loyalty that was left, 'I mean at the end of the day we work at KeyCo and we want to promote KeyCo. Something like that, it's nothing.... For such a big firm, you'd think they could do more in the local community'. Many stated specifically that they thought that the company should have more of a social and welfare role in the community, as one woman remarked, 'They build relationships, it's what makes the company tick, makes a company a company and not a them and us'. This kind of family atmosphere to the firm comes through clearly in descriptions of past company events. One such example involved a company outing to Coventry:

'I remember, it was the early sixties and we were celebrating the centenary of [KeyCo]. So they organised this trip to Coventry theatre, a show with Mike Yarwood and singing groups. for all the employees. There was a huge armada of [KeyCo] coaches for fifteen hundred of us. And we all went there, and the MD at that time, he got up onto the platform to give the welcome and there was a huge roar, a standing ovation from all the employees... It was a real feeling of belonging. You wouldn't get that now do you know what I mean?.... I certainly felt that at that time, that celebration, that warmth that there was towards that man'.

Legitimacy of management

Expectations

This links to discussions around the 'psychological contract' and 'specific area of inquiry' D. With regard to expectations of management, there was a difference in attitude between LockCo and KeyCo. In comparison to LockCo, where most felt that management should be concerned with production issues, only a handful of the KeyCo group stated that this should be a part of the managerial role. The most frequently mentioned expectation, was that managers should look after the welfare of their

employees. This included ensuring that employees were treated fairly, that conditions were safe and that employees had some kind of job satisfaction. In addition to this, and being mentioned by more people at KeyCo than at LockCo, people stated that they would like managers to come and speak to people on the shopfloor more often and that they should have a more friendly attitude towards employees, reminiscent of their views of the older family managers.

At KeyCo, the issue about managers working up from the shopfloor was also mentioned by far more people than at LockCo. Indeed there was a general view that managers were inexperienced, and indeed they are in terms of the lock industry, with almost all the current managerial team coming from outside of the industry. This was seen to affect the relationship between employees and managers in four main ways. Firstly, as managers do not fully understand the jobs employees are carrying out, unrealistic demands are felt to be made upon employees. Secondly, managers are not able to offer them expertise and advice and when managers have had to ask employees for advice about their jobs, it had caused them to lose confidence in managers' abilities. Some even remarked that they were able to exploit the effort bargain, as managers did not know how long it took to complete tasks. Finally, their lack of experience in the lock industry was felt to lead to their lack of concern for the welfare and treatment of shopfloor employees. This was particularly the case when the current management was compared to the family management of the past.

Identities

As at LockCo, despite the generally negative tone of feelings towards management, there was an impression of underlying commitment to the company. A similarly large proportion of the group as at LockCo, voiced a willingness to put in effort to make the

company successful and feelings of company loyalty. In addition, unlike at LockCo, more people agreed that they were proud of their company, than stated that they did not feel a sense of pride. In some cases, this pride was seen to relate to the brand name of KeyCo, '[KeyCo] is a well known company, if you go in hardware shops, or do-it-yourself shops you always see [KeyCo] so I feel quite proud to be part of that company really.. whereas you might be working for somebody who's got a bad reputation', and, 'Well it's got a very good name everywhere you go, when you talk about locks, the first thing people say is [KeyCo]. I think that's good and I think the company ought to realise that'. One man commented specifically about the pride that they had in making a good product and how this had declined, 'Oh absolutely, we try the best to make a good standard of lock, I think the way the company's going, we're losing that, which is a shame really, it's a shame it's getting this way, to lose that genuine pride down there'. There was a general feeling that people wanted to return to a situation where they could feel proud of where they worked, as one machinist remarked, 'I'd like to enjoy working for KeyCo again.... I'd like it to get back to the way it was'. This reflected a widespread, underlying affection for the company and working at the firm which matched similar feelings pervading the discourse of workers at LockCo. Working at KeyCo had been a part of most of their adult lives and as one person typically remarked, 'I've always loved KeyCo, I wouldn't have worked here twenty five years if I didn't would I? It's always been a comfort to come here'. People were genuinely unhappy about the decline in the atmosphere of the firm and the fact that they no longer enjoyed coming to work. Typical comments included, 'It used to be a happy-go-lucky place at one time, but not now', and, 'now it's just dog eat dog, the social atmosphere is gone.. at one time you used to come into work in the morning, you used to hear people whistling, but now you think 'Oh God, I've got to go to that place again'.

Summary and Comparison

There is a lot of similarity between the attitudes found at both companies. The general view of management was negative, with employees assessing the conduct of their managers on the basis of similar criteria; namely the deterioration in the level of contact with managers on the shopfloor and lack of concern for the welfare of the workforce. Employees at both firms compared their present managers with the family management of the past. Managers were not seen to meet the expectations that workers had of the management role, and there was a similarly low level of trust between the shopfloor and managers, plus a view that they did not share common objectives and goals. Finally, at both firms, there was a significant lack of company identity and shared team ethos even though there was some evidence of an underlying loyalty and pride in the company, and a willingness to put in effort for the good of the company. Workers at both firms discussed their managers using a similar vocabulary. There is a suggestion that the decline in company loyalty and pride had consequences in terms of work effort. One packer at KeyCo related an incident that occurred many years ago, soon after she had started at the company when people had stayed behind hours after work in order to meet an order that they were behind schedule for. Her view was that the reputation of the company was at stake and the promise to the customer had to be met, and therefore they felt obliged to work overtime. The discourse suggested however, that such an incident was much less likely to occur in the 1990s. The view of the shopfloor was of more 'give and take' in the early days, whereas now any requests for overtime work were seen in the light of redundancies, arbitrary changes to work organisation and the one sided relationship between managers and employees. At LockCo, for example, women on the 2295 line refused to work overtime because of the level of redundancies with a feeling that they should not be working over, if others were out of jobs. This part of chapter Four, was thus based around two comparisons; the first longitudinal at LockCo (although

making use of retrospective comments at KeyCo), and the second contemporaneous. The first demonstrated an identifiable increase in negativity of perceptions about management within general continuity over the period. The second illustrated very similar attitudes despite changed managerial policies and structures. The new managerial policies do not seem to have led to a qualitatively different kinds of perceptions about commitment and trust towards the company. These findings will be discussed in Chapter Five, specifically looking at the implications of the dismantling of paternalistic management styles, and the “drama of negotiation”. The next part of the chapter outlines the same comparisons with regard to attitudes and perceptions of the union organisation.

Chapter Four: Section Two. 'Us': The Union

This section presents the second part of the account of views from the shopfloor as set out in Chapter One relating to the worker-union 'corner' of the triangle of employment relationship. It begins by discussing some possible difficulties in representing views of the union from discursive data. Secondly a presentation of the formal institutional differentiation and demarcation of the union at the two companies is given, in order to build up the contextual picture of the parties involved in the employment relationship. The chapter then presents the main area of interest, which is with the subjective views and attitudes of the groups of workers towards their union within this context. The most significant findings are explored, looking specifically at; the salience of collective organisation, the nature of collectivism, union influence and power, expectations and experience of union effectiveness, and level of identification with the union as linked to 'specific area of inquiry' B. This is in order to build up a picture of the nature of commitment to the union as related to 'specific areas of inquiry' C and D. The emphasis is on discussing the changes and continuities that were seen over the period and how these are reflected in workers' vocabulary and rhetoric. These longitudinal findings are then compared with the views of workers at KeyCo, looking at the impact of specific difference in union organisation and strategy on employee perceptions. Finally a summary of findings is made.

Who is 'The Union'?

As with 'management', some possible reification of the term 'union' may have occurred which may obscure exactly what people mean when they talk about 'the union'. For example, am I, and they, referring to a shop steward, the convenor, a full time official,

the workplace organisation as a whole or the national organisation as a whole? However, once again, this use of the reified term 'the union' reflects the discourse of the workers involved. I have tried to indicate where relevant, the specific level of the union that people are referring to.

At national level, 'the union' consists of three full time officers; the General Secretary, the District Officer and the National Officer. They are supported by the Executive Committee (which involves all the convenors and members elected by company from their shop stewards) and three administrative staff. They are all based at the union headquarters in the centre of town, and while they can be contacted and called to the sites within twenty four hours, they are not commonly seen around the companies. The main focus of this research has been on the structures and processes of each workplace union organisation, which stand separate (although not unconnected) from the structures and processes of industrial relations of each firm. It is this level of 'the union' that appears to be the main object of discussion for workers at the lock companies. The informal in-plant structures of the union at LockCo and KeyCo are similar. At both companies, there is a convenor who holds the primary leadership role. There is then a network of shop stewards who form the first point of contact for the convenors for communication with the rank and file, and through whom the convenors can gauge general membership opinion. A formal structure also exists whereby the shop stewards meet as a committee once a month, for which they are allowed time off by the company. The shop steward representation tends to split on gender grounds with female shop stewards representing the predominantly female areas in the factory and male shop stewards representing the mainly male areas. The shop stewards are the ordinary members' first point of contact with the union. The small size of the national union and

of the firms means that any member has frequent contact with and easy access to the convenors. There is no official procedure or arrangements at either firm for consultation between employees and managers.

Views from the shopfloor at LockCo

The Saliency of Collectivism

In this section the findings are explored with respect to the general saliency of the trade union in 1996; answering the question, 'is the union seen as relevant to members interviewed?' This involved discussion of why workers felt that they were members of a trade union, and what benefits they felt they derived from trade unions. This relates directly to an assessment of some of the external industrial relations developments outlined in Chapter Two, anticipating the decline of collectivism and the utility of union membership in face of the persistent derision of unionism over the period since 1979.

Reasons for Membership

An appreciation of an unfavourable employment context was mentioned frequently by those interviewed in 1996 to a far greater extent than those in 1983. Characteristics of this unfavourable context included: deteriorating employment rights vis-à-vis a stronger and less sympathetic management, a deteriorating wage situation; deteriorating job security within the wider context of high unemployment and wider market difficulties, including the threat to the industry of foreign imports. An appreciation of this context was highlighted particularly in responses to questions regarding the reasons for trade union membership. The sections below reflect the reasons for union membership most

frequently mentioned by employees and involve balancing the power of management and issues of pay and the wider economic climate.

Balancing the power of management

A widely held view in both 1983 and 1996 was that a union was needed to balance the power of management. There was a clear impression in the 1996 interviews that employees felt that they had lost power in their relationship with management in a climate where their position was increasingly vulnerable. This was illustrated by comments from one worker in 1996, 'That's the only form of protection you've got against any management today', while another employee added, 'with the legislation that's recently been brought in, you do need a union to look after your interests, if you didn't they'd (management) just run over you'. With regard specifically to the legislation requiring two year's service for entitlement to statutory benefits, one paint shop worker in 1996 stated, '.. it's despicable what they're doing to a good many people, they'll never be able to get the proper benefits of working, unless they come to a stable place with a union that fights for them because out there it's cold and getting bloody colder'.

Overall, comments reflected an identical vocabulary/repertoire to those from 1983, for example, 'otherwise I think the management would just do as they did years ago, 'either work on my conditions or that's it'. So I think you've got to have the Union', and, 'They are important because otherwise the management would just do what they liked with you, you know, they'd just sack you if they wanted to whereas if there was no union, it wouldn't be very good for us would it'.

Additionally, many in 1996 mentioned reasons for membership relating to the union acting as a voice for employees particularly in areas of redress to management and in cases of accident claims. This was also seen as a primary reason for membership in 1983, but this time, more people mentioned it. There was however, a slight difference in

the nuance of explanations for why the union was needed to act as a voice for employees. In 1996, individual workers recognised their inability to represent their own interests in a context where management clearly held the upper hand and hence the need for a collective body to present employee interests. One worker commented, 'people ought to have some form of redress, to address a problem and they haven't got the power themselves, but have got the power if there's a union spokesman'. Another worker linked this viewpoint to an idea that the union was needed to provide a voice in the face of powerful management, 'I think.. management would really try things on. And if the face don't fit or they don't like you for some reason, you're out.. whereas you have got that bit of backing from the union.. knowing there's a shop steward, a union behind you, they can't get away with things like that'. There was a general feeling that workers have few other avenues of support apart from the union, which links to views of the value of the union for workers in general. As one female machinist stated, 'I think its the only thing the working class people have got. I think its a very good thing. You can't really be without one', which was supported by more general comments such as, 'I think they exist for the life and prosperity of the working class', and 'I think trade unions exist to look after the work people really'. ²⁵

Some difference can be noted: in 1983, the tone of comments was rather more towards the view that employees should have a voice as a right or principle rather than emphasising the inability and loss of power of the individual worker. For example, as one paint shop worker remarked, 'you have got a representative of the Shop floor meeting with the management sort of thing, to help the working people case. You've got top management and you've got to have somebody in the Union capable of meeting this top management on their own level sort of thing'. A

²⁵It is interesting to note that LockCo workers in 1996 do identify themselves as being part of the 'working class'. Recent survey findings have found that this is still a majority view in the UK, but is declining. (Centre for Research into Elections and Social Trends, Guardian, 15/01/99, p 3)

shop steward added, 'I think it's essential, that we go to the management and say well this is the members' feeling on this or the worker's feeling'.

This complements the fact that there was a general feeling among today's workforce that management were out to exploit employees. In a context where workers were aware of the deteriorating employment situation and the use of short time working elsewhere in the industry, management were not seen as offering any reassurances. Relating back to the views of the goals of management in the previous chapter, as one employee stated, 'Their ideal of the work force is without full time employment; a hire and fire work force'. This connects to the issue of victimisation by and vindictiveness of, management which was seen as an issue by workers in 1996 (See Chapter Four, Section One).

Pay and wider economic considerations

There has also been a growing dissatisfaction with pay between 1983 and 1996. While less than half of people in the re-interview group in 1983 (and less than a quarter of the wider group) had an unfavourable view of their wage situation, this had leapt to over three quarters by 1996, and more significantly, had extended from a few tool room skilled workers to a majority spread across all grades. In 1983, there was a view that they were lucky to get the wages that they did bearing in mind the fact that the economy was in recession at the time. As workers commented, 'Well from our point of view I think we've done very well at [LockCo]. Well [LockTown] has done very well through the recession. I mean the West Midlands is a black spot but I think the lock industry as a whole has escaped the worst effects of it.', and, 'To be honest I think they've done well in the recession here. I think we've all been very lucky'. In addition, there was a feeling expressed in 1983, but not in 1996, that it was important that high wages were not demanded because this would threaten jobs. One tool room worker compared the success of LockCo with that of other Midlands firms which

had closed down, 'Nobody ever dreamt that Rubery Owens [a prominent engineering firm in a neighbouring town], would have closed... All those paying the high wages have gone, so whether it's got a bearing on it or the current trading situation I don't know but we're still trading. We've never been the best paid in the area, never been highly paid in the area but we've still got jobs'. Another added similarly, 'I think because of the situation outside we have slipped behind, but on the other hand it has been very noticeable that the very large wage earners in the area have gone to the wall.... a lot of other companies that were paying a lot better money than us have all disappeared virtually so whether you can say they were overpaid people, even toolmakers in the car industry are better off than us, but at the present time we find ourselves far better off than them'.

The nature of dissatisfaction was also different in 1983. The discourse suggested that much of the dissatisfaction with wages in 1983 stemmed from inequalities within the company, particularly concerning the way in which the changes to the grading structure of 1975 had reduced the differential between skilled tool room workers and semi-skilled assemblers and machinists. Those in the tool room were particularly vocal in 1983 about the inequity of the present scheme,

'Everybody will want to be a labourer if you start getting these kind of figures, everybody will want to be dustbin men and there isn't an incentive for a young fellow to want to do a particular job such as tool making. I mean you can get more by assembling locks on a production line or bobbing and polishing if you like. I know it's piecework but at the end of the day he still comes to work, that's what I think about wages.'

Another commented likewise, 'Well they are on a G grade and we're on Bs and things, they only produce if we're around, I think the top rate for a tool setter is now £126 thereabouts but..... if they (*G grades*) work over like some of them do then they're going to get more, they can be taking more away than the skilled are who have the responsibility of putting the tools in and making sure that they products and quality of it is coming off correctly' (my italics). Wages were felt to have fallen far behind other

industries because of this decline in the differentials, while wage structures within the company were seen to have become increasingly unfair.

In 1996, there was little mention of the need to maintain differentials between skilled and semi-skilled workers. Dissatisfaction with the level of wages was expressed with regard to comparisons outside the factory:

'when I left school.... by far manufacturing and engineering was the best option for employment... if you compared yourself then with the people that I consider have overtaken us now, insurance agents, people that do manual jobs in the building industry..... Their money is astronomical now compared to us whereas in those days they were our poor relations'.

There was dissatisfaction voiced by about half of the re-interview group with regard to the grading structure within the firm, but this was not concerned with the differentials between skill levels but rather was seen to involve two other issues. Firstly, where tasks had been added to jobs without extra pay, 'they're asking people now to do things they've never done before and they're not being rewarded for their efforts'. Secondly, there was a recognition by people on higher grades that there were people at the bottom of the pay structure whose wages were unfairly low, 'You should have your differentials, but I also think everyone's got to live. You know, I think some of the very low paid here, I think their wages are abysmal, terrible..... I don't think anyone should work for less than a living wage'.

In addition, where the grading structure was teamed with a merit system, this was seen as further evidence of management arbitrariness, and of a situation where favouritism and victimisation were endemic. As one shop steward commented, 'The union has no input into it whatsoever, you can't earn it, it's given, I mean you look at that, all it's implications. If you've got the right colour eyes, if your face fits, you're all right' (Greene, 1995). Another person used exactly the same phrases: 'You can have no union representation, it's you against them, and I must

say that at times, it is the colour of your eyes, whether your face fits'. Another pointed to the humiliation having to ask for the merit rise every year, 'You have to go and ask your personal superintendent and they can say 'Yay' or 'Nay', .. they don't have to give you any reason.. it's a bit cap in hand sort of situation, you've got to beg for the rise'. The situation of dissatisfaction with pay coupled with a desire for an increased role for the union in this area appears to parallel their appreciation of the insecurity that exists in the wider lock industry. Employees were pessimistic about the prospects of the industry, 'I can't really see much future here.. it's quite frightening when you think what might be around the corner in a year or two'.

Thus, for slightly different reasons, pay has remained a highly ranked reason for union membership between 1983 and 1996, and similar numbers of people across the period mentioned pay as a reason for union membership. Yet despite the apparent diminution of union power, arising from market insecurity, workers in the 1990s desired an increased role for the union in this area. Traditional concerns dominated the reasons why people are union members, indeed only two people specifically mentioned 'individual benefits' as a reason for membership, in both cases, this related to the accident benefit available through membership of the union.

Summary

The main aim of this section was to look at the influence of change, and particularly contextual change over time, on perceptions of the union organisation. The salience of the union has grown in the eyes of LockCo employees over the past two decades, whilst their general assessment was that the employer's position has been consolidated and that of the employee had considerably declined. In an increasingly unfavourable economic context, the union organisation was seen as more relevant and necessary to ordinary members. Indeed, the pessimism of some of the workers themselves in 1983 as to the

salience of the union was not carried over to those in 1996. In 1983, an industry closed shop existed at LockCo, and there was a lot of opposition to this. Many stated that they would not have joined voluntarily and thought that a lot of people would drop out of the union if the closed shop ended. In addition, a substantial group in 1983 took the view that the union was, 'necessary rather than liked'. The discourse of workers does not suggest that this latent dissatisfaction has materialised in the 1990s, where there is almost unanimous support for voluntary membership of the union. Indeed the law now requires that ballots for the use of check off are held ²⁶. The resigning process for union membership at LockCo was held in January 1997 and was overwhelmingly successful with the loss of only one member and the gaining of twenty five new members ²⁷. This again relates to overall continuity in attitude across the period, with gradual trends towards the union being seen as more salient in the changed context. This finding will be returned to within the discussion of the findings at KeyCo later in this part of Chapter four, where the influence of specific difference in union and management organisation and strategy will be considered.

The Nature of Collectivism and Traditional Values

The area of discussion now turns to the impact of the wider industrial relations context over the period (linked to 'specific area of inquiry' B) on the nature of trade unionism and whether there has been an erosion of collectivism and a move to more individualistic expectations of the trade union. I was interested to determine opinions with respect to traditional trade union 'rights' such as the right to strike, the right to influence government and the right to political affiliation.

²⁶TURERA 1993.

²⁷Meeting with the LockCo convenor 22nd January 1997

Right to take industrial action and mobilise support

Most employees in both the 1980s and the 1990s supported the right to strike. Moreover, with regard to the wider group of interviews, support had risen, so whereas in 1983 one in five did not support strike action, in 1996 support was unanimous. Issues mentioned specifically were alterations in contracts, unfair dismissal, sick pay, conditions and to get pay rises, though one respondent made it clear that it was not worth it to strike for a small percentage increase. More people mentioned pay than in 1983, and the proportion of people who saw victimisation of an individual as a reason to strike increased fourfold (Greene, 1995), which links to the discussion in the previous sub-section and in Section One, about the deterioration in the relationship between managers and employees.

However, employees then and now, were very concerned that strikes should be used 'sparingly and moderately' and would only be deemed necessary as a last resort, over 'important issues'. Typical comments in the 1980s were, 'The ultimate weapon, the H bomb sort of thing', and 'I can't see much point in striking unless it's something that's really serious' which are echoed by comments in 1996, 'not to strike over every thing that comes up but I think if an issue is strong enough', and, 'strike action should always be used as a last resort'. The concerns of employees with regard to strike action were obvious, indeed at a shop floor meeting ²⁸, support for the union in the pay negotiations was given, but some people were concerned to point out that an offer of their support to the union did not equate with support for a strike. The convenor had to outline the various aspects of collective support that could be given short of striking (such as overtime bans, hour long stoppages) in order to reassure them.

²⁸Meeting held by the convenor on the shopfloor with one department and its shop stewards to discuss the pay settlement being offered 14 July 1997.

Together with the cautious views towards the use of strike action, employees were very concerned that there should not be a return to the frequent strikes experienced in the 1970s (albeit this was not their direct experience as the lock industry is notable for a scarcity of strikes throughout its history). Workers in 1983 had been similarly, if not more vocal about their cautious attitude towards the use of strike action. Then there was a view that in general, unions had too much power, which was reflected in the frequency of strikes. Indeed, many people talked about the strikes of the Water Workers, and were adamant that this was unfair industrial action, particularly in the existing context of high unemployment. As one female machinist stated, 'I think they [the water workers] should be grateful they've got a job, this moment like because there's that many out, redundant and places shutting down, they ought to be grateful they've got a job.... There again it shouldn't give the management to do what they like with you.'

The main reason why people felt that there would be a lack of support for industrial action in 1983, was because of fears of damaging the company and therefore leading to loss of jobs: 'I think it's a deep seated thing that people do see that there's a lot of unemployment, there's a great number people generally throughout the country being made redundant, it has affected this company to an extent and people just don't want to push things to the extent whereby they might be jeopardising their own situation.'

Similarly, it is interesting to note that a large minority in 1996, whilst voicing complete support for the right to strike, and recognising the importance of having the strike weapon 'in the wings', also recognised that the recourse to industrial action could be seen as a sign of union weakness (as is discussed below). There was also a view in 1996 that people would not really be willing to go on strike now, due to the legislation which had been put in place, 'There was no legislation to stop you then, any problem that wasn't resolved to our liking or to our benefit was met with instant down tools by everybody. But now they can be as

unreasonable as they like and you can't do a thing about it. This dispute now they are just taking the heat out of it by just putting it into procedure'.

On the other hand, there was also support for some of the legislation that had been put in place because it was seen to stop the use of unnecessary strike action. As one assembler commented, 'Well, the little I agree with what this present government's done, I think it's right that it should be balloted. I don't think you should stand on a car park, like in the old days, I don't agree with that, but I think if it's balloted for, I think you should have the option to strike'. Another added, 'Some of the changes that have taken place, I think, have been beneficial to the union. I mean ballots for instance where legislation said people must be balloted, secret ballot and not a show of hands. I mean some people were frightened in the past, I must admit I've seen it happen here, you know, people aren't in favour, but when they see everybody else putting their hand up they think 'oh well, I don't want to be the odd one out''. This recognition of the impact of legislation was not voiced at all in 1983, indeed the major legislation affecting strike action did not come into place until 1984.

Right for a wider social and political role

Individualism is associated with a narrow focus on immediate issues 'close to home', and the de-politicisation of unions (Fosh, 1993). The discussion here focused on two issues: firstly whether the lock union should have a role outside of the workplace, and secondly, whether trade unions in more general terms should have a say in the social and political sphere.

Most people in 1996 supported this right of unions to have a wider social and political role, particularly in influencing government. A significant increase in the view that trade unions should influence government was found, from about a third of those interviewed in 1983 to three quarters of the wider group in 1996. In addition, many in 1983 stated that the union should not have a political role compared to only one person in 1996 who

stated that, 'I just don't see where they come into the running of the country, unions', and that unions should concentrate on workplace issues. There was a general feeling in 1996 that unions were best placed to represent the views of 'working people'. As one employee remarked, 'At the end of the day, the union has got its members' interests at heart which is the general public's interests, so we'd be trying to represent to the government the feelings of the people on the street.. because the government is too far removed from the man on the street to know what he wants'. Many also specifically desired an increased role for the union as a pressure group on local MPs in the face of threats to the lock industry. As one employee commented, 'They could sound MPs out, about problems what might affect the industry from the outside such as foreign imports... I think it has got a strong role to play in that'. Another remarked likewise, 'They could try and persuade them (the government) where to look. At the moment we've got a thing about cheap imports....., so if they could try and get on to them and get something done about that'. In contrast, any support for a wider political role for unions in 1983 focused around more general social and economic issues such as, 'I think they should influence government policy if it's at all possible to be more social, be more involved in social matters, be more/less dictatorial and more involved in people's requirements rather than/in other words more or less in direct opposition to the situation she's [*Mrs. Thatcher*] been getting into all the time' (My italics).

However, there were some qualifications to the support given to a union political role even in 1996. Some had a more cautious view, voicing concern that unions should not be a 'Thorn in their [the government's] side', and that unions should not have too strong an influence: 'they can have an integral part of the government if it's done in the right way and not to an extent where they were running the government'.

Finally, one foreman voiced a similar concern that unions should not have too strong an influence because of their minority role in the country, 'Well I believe that.... trade unions should have an opinion with the people in government... what you've got to remember is there's only what

four/five million trade unionists among a population of what fifty million so you've got to be careful there because people not connected to unions would object to it if it was a big one, of they had a big say in what company policy was. You can see why the rest of the population would object to that'. This matches the views of those in 1983 who had expressed only qualified support for a wider political role and talked in a similar way about the possible excesses of union influence, 'I mean they can put a government down can't they, a union, if they want to, it's already been said before with the national coal board strike, they put a government down'.

It is interesting to take note of the non-responses in 1996 here, because it illustrates the un-politicized nature of some of the group who were not able to provide a direct answer stemming from a self-reported lack of interest in politics in general and disillusionment with politics of today. This is also reflected in the views regarding the political affiliation of trade unions. While most employees in 1996 felt unions should have a political role, a significant number did not feel that this should involve a direct affiliation of their union to a political party. Indeed the proportion opposed to political affiliation has increased, and is a more prominent viewpoint in the 1996 interviews. This was illustrated in the comments of one worker in 1996,

'That depends on the people... if the people want to be affiliated to say the Labour party, Conservative party, they should express it to the union itself, but other than that, it's hard to say.... I think really, they should try and be as neutral as possible.... rather than saying we should be affiliating to that party and not that party, I mean they should be looking at policies and not parties I think'. Another expressed a parallel view that, 'I don't think from a shop steward, representing your workers, that politics ever came into it. It didn't matter whether you were talking to a Tory, or a Socialist, or a Liberal, and we've had all those in the shop.. because you represent them for the job they do... it doesn't matter what party they are'.

This said however, more people in 1996 were supportive of political affiliation, with those who commented further wanting this affiliation to be with the Labour Party. As one man remarked, 'I agree with them being with the Labour Party because the conservatives have nothing to do with us. They aren't working class. The Labour are more for the working class than the Conservatives'. Another stated, 'the one goes in with the other, historically the labour party would not have existed without the trade union movement'. Even some of those employees who supported affiliation voiced concern that this should not be imposed on the members but should be an option open to them. In 1983, workers supported the need for political affiliation in identical terms of the necessity of affiliation for the survival of the Labour Party. People spoke in similar terms, 'I don't think they'd be a Labour Party if it wasn't.' and, 'there wouldn't be a Labour Party if it wasn't for the trade unions. They should be wholly behind the Labour Party'. Another added, 'the Tories have got the money behind them haven't they? So you've got to have something to back the Labour Party haven't you?'. It is important to note that there is a context of a tradition within the union of not affiliating to any political party (Stenner, 1989).

In relation to the lock industry's occupational community, there was a generally positive opinion of the lock union's involvement outside of the workplace, which can be compared with the generally negative views of the role of the company. Most stated that the union did get involved in the local community. Activities that were mentioned included, Family Fun Days, union dances, sports sponsorship, charity sponsorship, the lock museum, celebrations for the union's fiftieth anniversary, company perks such as sick leave and a political role with local MPs. Many commented that such union events were popular; indeed tickets for the Valentine's Dance in 1996 sold out and there was a waiting list. The shop steward's committee meetings regularly involve agenda items where the union launches a fund-raising campaign for employees who are critically ill, or as on one occasion, the union organised to have the company placed on the donor

register because a relative of a member was in need of a kidney transplant ²⁹. In addition, union officials had positions of authority in the local community; something which was traditionally encouraged within the union (Stenner, 1989, 1983). The existing General Secretary was a local magistrate, a lay representative on Industrial Tribunals, and held a position in the TUC Midlands Region Education Council. The District Organiser was a local councillor and was a co-founder (with the KeyCo convenor) of the West Midlands region RSI support group set up in 1994. Finally, the President (and LockCo convenor) was a member of the Urban Renewal Committee set up in 1997 by the European Commission to fund regeneration schemes within LockTown.

Only two people commented that the level of community involvement by the union had declined over the period (compared to the high level of negative views with regard to company involvement outlined in the previous section). This related to a feeling that the occupational community was breaking down as people moved away from LockTown and commuted to work, and other home-based leisure activities such as television and computer games had become more popular. One person commented on the changed attitudes of employees:

'Whereas many years ago, there was a little social club, and if you went down there, there was one big happy crowd, now that's gone..... It started to die, it seems as though they was more interested in staying in and watching the telly, that'd how it's gradually over the years petered out. So you'd got to the club, we've been in there and there's only been four people in there all night. Hardly anyone coming in or doing anything. It was quite a good social club. People change as they grow older, they don't want to be bothered half the time, it's more comfortable to sit in the house and the pub down the road's just been refurbished although you're paying a lot more for your beer. They go down there. And the youngsters have a tendency now to hit the discos and stuff like that'.

²⁹Shop steward's committee meeting, 19th July 1995.

The other employee felt that the level of involvement had declined due to people moving out of the LockTown region, 'in the past were you had large companies, they tended to work where the company was. They tended to live there. Now they come by car from a distance away and you haven't got the same involvement in your community here..... It started to disappear in the sixties when transport became more easily available and people started to move out'. The handful who stated that the union should not increase this kind of involvement felt that members did not really care too much about this part of the union role. One of those who personally would welcome increased involvement in this area of activities stated: 'I would think that this is the last reserve of what members want... I don't think this would matter too much'

However, perhaps the most support for the union's role here came in the widespread views that the union should increase its involvement. These activities were seen as good publicity for the union, particularly in a context where unions were seen to have a bad reputation in the media. As one man commented, 'I think that's good, it gives a good publicity, it lets people know that the union does care about them, other things than just the work place, you know. They're trying to fit in with every day activities and that. It makes people aware, I'm not saying that it wins, but at least they try'. Another added, 'they do like the sporting activities that these have dropped off, each company's dropped off. I think there is a role for unions to step in there, cause it would bring in the younger members, and would make them more aware of what's happening, and what unions do, because the media give them unfavourable press and everything and youngsters at school are never told the proper truth about unions. It's all this, they're nasty buggers and that sort of thing. They would realise then that it's run by the mums and dads sort of thing. I think it would be good thing for them to latch onto that sort of thing'.

There was a feeling also that the union has began to take on some of the paternalistic involvement that the company used to have. A prime example was the union taking over the running of the Locks Welfare Society when the company had relinquished responsibility (See Section One). It had become the union's role to take on the mantle of

campaigning for the maintenance of facilities that hark back to the era of family paternalism such as the Social Club and the company canteen.

Membership participation and involvement

Another way of plumbing the nature of commitment to the union in terms of level of collectivism, was to look at how willing members were to mobilise support behind the union and to take an active and participatory role in the union (linked to the issue of how this affects how effective the union can be in the workplace as discussed in Chapter Two). As a spontaneously given reason for union membership, the need for collective action or recognition of a collective spirit was not prevalent in 1996. Only one person mentioned it directly, whereas in 1983, nearly a third of the wider group evoked an idea of collective spirit among workers as a reason for membership. However, this did not mean that collective action was ruled out as a viable solution for workers. While people in both periods were very cautious about the use of industrial action, in particular strike action, there were also incidents that demonstrated elements of membership willingness to mobilise support behind the union and take collective action. When new piecework values were set on a particular line without prior consultation in November 1997 ³⁰, the ten women on the line refused to work to the new values, taking a drop in wages to unmeasured pay in protest. This stand against management led to the reinstatement of the old values. Similarly, a decision by the company to introduce new disciplinary procedures into the existing sick pay scheme without consultation led to a factory-wide hour stoppage of work. People also refused to work overtime when offered because there were other people around the factory without work and because of the redundancy situation that existed. As one shop steward related, 'We were asked to do weekend overtime to

which I politely told them to f-off because people are under worked and wanting for jobs, let alone the redundancies' ³¹. Over Christmas 1997, one hundred and fifty employees refused to work on a day which had customarily been a holiday, and which had been arbitrarily revoked by management that year. This meant the loss of a day's wages for those who had not come to work.

These examples illustrate an issue-based solidarity that was also obvious in the early 1980s. In 1983 similar incidents were related, such as worker opposition to an incentive scheme because it would threaten jobs, 'it's been going on for years about being incentive paid but there's just no way as a group of people we're going to push a group of people out the door which is what it would mean to go incentive paid... we're totally unanimously against it now because it'll just mean redundancies, I mean there's no secret or anything'.

Others commented how they helped each other out on the line, 'To be honest a lot of the work I do for the one sprayer, I shouldn't do really, .. but she'd have that much work she couldn't cope and she's a friend of mine as well like, a good friend and we do have to help. I think if it was the other way round and I was a pieceworker and she was a day worker I know she'd do it for me..'. One shop steward remarked how the union was able to drum up support on the shop floor over certain issues, 'In fact when we've had a real problem, I've gone round drumming support up in the past and saying we have got to make a stand on this, you know and I have had that support generally'. It seems that over specific issues, workers across the whole period were willing to support each other collectively, sometimes foregoing individual profit for a wider collective purpose and principle.

With regard to union participation, only a minority in 1996 considered themselves to be active union members. All of these people held union related positions, such as shop

³⁰Meeting with LockCo Convenor 13th November 1997

stewards, ex shop stewards, health and safety reps, and the wife of the General Secretary of the union. There is some change from 1983, where more people directly stated that they were active union members, however, in neither period did this necessarily lead to them having unequivocal involvement with union activities although they had all attended at least some union meetings. One of the shop stewards in 1996 commented that he was not a willing shop steward candidate and therefore did not feel that he was active as he should be,

'not too active, to be honest, I do attend the district committees, and I try and pass on everything I'm told to members and that. But I was drafted in to the union, because no one else would do it... I got lumbered with it, but I do it. I'm still waiting for a young blood to come along..... to take it off my shoulders sort of thing, I'd quite willingly step down to let someone else do it,'.

The other shop steward stated, '[I'm] not 100% committed to every activity, but I go when I can'. Finally, the health and safety representative admitted that he did not attend union meetings other than the occasional AGM. The prevalent viewpoint was that people were not active in the union and did not attend meetings. Some in 1996 commented that their level of activity had declined. Three people explained their lower levels of activity as due to the fact that they were no longer shop stewards, while another commented that his enthusiasm had waned as he got older. This was complemented by the fact that only two people would willingly consider taking up a post of shop steward. Most were not interested at all in standing as a shop steward, including the employee who was already a health and safety representative. Common reasons cited were that of being too old and not wanting the hassle of the job. Indeed one employee who had been a shop steward in the past, now considered themselves to be inactive in the union. She explained her

³¹ Shop Steward's Committee meeting 22nd October 1997

withdrawal from union activities in terms that suggested that a shop steward needed to have a particular kind of personality to be able to cope with the pressures of the position, 'I just didn't want the hassle anymore, like I do get uptight about things. If I could be more relaxed about it, I think I would enjoy it... but you cant. I suppose it's just confidence, you just lack the confidence sometimes to go there and do it'.

This was mirrored by other views, with people feeling that they did not possess the right personality for the job. There was a recognition that the role of a shop steward made particular demands in terms of personal abilities, responsibility and time which most did not feel they were capable of giving. In particular, the shop steward's role was seen to demand a lot of public speaking in terms of debating and arguing which the employees did not feel they possessed the skills for. As one man commented,

'I don't think I'm cut out for public speaking as such, and I'm one of the many who like to sit and listen and take it all in that way. I don't think I'm cut out for it to be honest with you, although my opinions, I can argue with friends and you know, I think this and I think that, but I just, personality's not cut out for it I don't think. To argue cases for people and they'll say 'oh no you can't do that' and I'll probably just say 'okay then' and walk away like, you know, so no.'

Another re-iterated this, 'Um, well you've got to stand up and talk and tell people what's gone on, and I don't know that I could. I would think to be a proper one, you've got to listen, if anyone's got a grievance..... you've got to be able to listen and then put their grievance to the foreman or superintendent.'

In 1983, clashes of time were most frequently offered as excuses for lack of involvement and participation but there was also a general view that the shop steward's position was a difficult one, as in 1996. One man pointed to the high expectations that workers had of shop stewards,

'I don't think it's a job I'd like myself. I don't know, the job of shop steward seems a funny job altogether.... People expect miracles, they come to you with a problem and they want it resolved right

there and then and I think they don't give the fellow enough time to find out what he can do and what he can't sort of thing. I think they want action straightaway.',

Others pointed to the detrimental impact it could have on your relationship with work mates for the same kind of reasons, 'you get a lot of enemies. You know the women, as I say, they think you can do wonders and you can't, you can only do so much.'. The attitude of the official 'activists' and of the more general rank and file fits in with findings from past studies, that there is a sense of moral embarrassment felt if they are not seen to be active union members. Members felt that they ought to have been more involved and that they had to make excuses for their lack of involvement (Greene, 1995). In general, there was a view that the shop steward's role was an onerous one and this matches the many studies which have pointed to the pressures on and level of stress felt by people in union leadership positions (See Barling et al (1992) for a summary).

Summary

There was substantial support for the right to take industrial action and for the union to have a wider social and political role. Indeed support had increased over the period. However, workers expressed qualified support in both periods, emphasising the need for a cautious use of strike action and moderate stance towards management. There was also a new recognition of the difficulties posed by legislation on the ability to strike. While a wider political role was desired, and increased involvement in the wider community, there was less support in 1996 for direct affiliation to a political party. While members believed that their union should have a political voice, this has not led to a personal interest in politics for most. Finally, union participation across the period has declined, and while people find the union to be more necessary and beneficial, they were somewhat less willing to become actively involved in 1996. There is general continuity

in attitude across the period, but with trends within that continuity for the need for the union to take an increased role in the present context. Again, this will provide interesting comparison with KeyCo, looking at how such perceptions are affected by different policies and strategies.

Union Influence and Power

Here, I wanted to investigate the opinion of members regarding their views of the power and influence that their union had in the workplace and in the wider community. This involved questions about whether they felt that their union was powerful or not, and perhaps more importantly, what did they think constituted a powerful union; what was the nature of union 'power' in their world view?

Generally, there was a view that the power of all unions had declined over the 1980s. Most people in 1996 did not see their union as powerful whereas most had in 1983, and this loss of power was seen as reflecting the decline at the national level. One employee in 1996 stated, 'I don't know if there's such a thing as a powerful union now. The real power has been taken away from the unions.. I don't think they are the threat that they used to be'. This was reflective of the feeling in 1983, 'unions are not as strong as they used to be. I don't think Len Murray and people like this, they don't listen, they haven't got so much to say as what they used to do. I mean at one time all you ever saw on the television for a certain number of years was union leaders. It's very rare you see them now. They seem to have gone into the background a little bit,'

The nature of union 'power'

The interviews were designed to uncover whether some aspects of people's consciousness (that they may not have been necessarily aware), formed part of their frame of reference. One such issue involved what people meant by 'union power' across the period. They

could comment on whether they thought unions were powerful or not, but what did this assessment actually refer to, what made up the components of union power? This was not one of the agenda areas in 1983 but information was acquired from more general analysis of the interviews. In order to complement the general discussion, employees were also asked to comment on a list of possible characteristics of union power, discussing whether they thought they made a union powerful.

Size

In line with the wave of merger activity that has occurred over the 1990s (See Chapter Two), it was anticipated that the small size of the NULMW might be considered as a cause of its weakness. Indeed, most people in 1996 appeared to see the size of membership as an important characteristic of union power. A few related the small size of their own union to its lack of influence, with typical comments including, 'it [has] less of a say globally than a larger union', and 'the NULMW loses clout being small'. Another effect of the union's small size included financial weakness, 'Our union is not a large union and we have our disputes, but it could bankrupt the union in no time at all. We have seen larger unions go bankrupt.'. This said however, some of these people also made additional comments. Two workers, while commenting on the lack of power of the NULMW due to its small size, also felt that large unions are threatened too, 'I don't think it applies so much today as it used to.. I mean the bigger the union, you'd think the more powerful they are, but they can still come a cropper '. In other words, a lack of power and influence was not exclusive to small unions, but was a national characteristic. Furthermore, despite comments about small size leading to lack of influence, an equally prevalent view was that size was not that important a characteristic of union power. This was also seen as an issue in 1983, when a minority commented more generally that they felt that the small size of the NULMW made it

weaker. On the other hand, there were notable changes in view over the period, such as an ex-Convenor who in 1983 was very supportive of merging with a larger union, but who by 1996 had decided that the union was more effective by remaining small and independent and praised the union for both its record in pay settlements, particularly in the recessionary periods and for its legal aid service. Compare his comments in 1983, 'I've always been in favour of going in a bigger union.... I think we're too small, a fish in a big pond', with his change of heart by 1996, 'in years gone by.. I used to think that some of the larger unions were a lot more forceful... to tell you the truth I don't think so now... looking back I was mistaken, and it was better to stop as a small union'.

People in 1996 also commented that what mattered more than the size of membership however, was the amount of backing that the members gave the union, as one man remarked, 'if you've got the percentage power, that's great. Like if you only have five thousand members but you've got four thousand five hundred or four thousand seven hundred behind you, then that's quite powerful'. This view was voiced by another person who did not see size as important because, 'It's all according to the members.. I suppose really if you only have ten of you and you tend to stick together, you would perhaps be stronger, you know than say fifty who couldn't agree on anything..'. This reflects a general discourse of a situation where 'the members are the union': a frequently voiced phrase.

These attitudes echoed those of 1983 where there were similar views that, 'it isn't the unions that have got the power at the end of the day, it's the workforce who have got the power. I mean if you've got the muscle, the unions can go as far as they want to go, if you've got muscle'. Others commented that, 'Our biggest adversary I think is apathy on the part of the members.', which was added to by views placing blame on the weakness of the union on the nature of the membership in the existing economic context: 'To a large extent that aggressiveness on some people's part I think has been suppressed a lot now by the fact that there is a great deal of unemployment

and obviously people don't want to rock the boat too much because they/there's always a possibility of things going wrong'.

Industrial Action

Commonly, an ability to take industrial action was seen as typifying the powers of union organisations, although whether strike action is seen as a sign of power or weakness has been the cause of much debate (See Chapter Two). At LockCo, workers in both 1996 and 1983, held up the strike-ridden period of the 1970s as a time when the unions were seen as powerful in Britain. The ability of a union to strike is obviously seen as a significant characteristic of union power in both periods with a typical comment being that 'Striking is the ultimate weapon'. However, a large minority also remarked that strike action was a sign of weakness, 'I think it's the ability to negotiate without coming to that.. I would say they'm weak in the negotiating side of it if they'm tending to strike at the drop of a hat, or they see the only way to win whatever they're after is to strike. I don't see that as an especially strong union'. Another added, 'You should always try and prevent a strike.... at the end of the day, you have got to try and reach an agreement with management'. There were also other concerns voiced which qualified the view of striking as a sign of union power. One person who saw ability to strike as important, also stated that a union that went on strike frequently and over any issue would be seen as weak. Such an attitude was added to by another employee who gave a more ambiguous response to whether or not ability to strike was seen as a characteristic of union power. They stated that it needed to be maintained only as a last resort weapon because, 'If you have got fair thinking management, that try to improve conditions and pay on a basis of how well the company is doing, and try to look after the welfare of the workers, then strike action is never needed. But obviously you get management that don't think like that. And for the benefit of the workers its a very useful tool, not on a long term basis. The people that suffer in the long run are always the members'.

This is complemented by other views which supported a moderate stance towards industrial relations. Two employees in 1996 stated that it was always better to compromise rather than to resist management, for example: 'If it gets that bad they should resist, but if they could find a compromise it would be better. Stop any troubles or strikes'. On the other hand however, half of the re-interview group stated that there was a place for direct resistance and that the union should resist management over certain issues, with one employee specifically mentioning that the union should have resisted the recent redundancy exercise. Comments included, 'there will be times when you've got to resist, it's all right keep bending with the breeze, everybody's got to bend with the breeze but there are times when you've got to say, 'not unless you'm going to bend that way and all'.

Overall though, there has been a decline in the profile of strike action as a characteristic of union power. Indeed this parallels findings from the 1995 study (Greene, 1995). While there was continuity in the attitude that their union had little power, those in 1983 tended to see union power in terms of the ability to take industrial action, while in the 1990s, most people who mentioned areas where their union was 'powerful' saw this as concerning success in the workplace. This perhaps suggests that union members in 1996 have recognised the barriers to industrial action, some of which have been imposed by the legislation. One worker commented, 'The legislation has slowed the process down. I mean something could happen today and whereas at one time, you'd just be out the door,.... now it's difficult to do anything like that... the cooling off period tends to stretch it out a lot more and people lose interest'. Another added, 'If they (the laws) were a bit more lenient, I think there could have been industrial action taken in the past. But you know things are tied down now, so tight that you can't do it'. Bearing in mind the legislative restrictions on strike action today, while it is still seen as an important aspect of union power by over half of the group in 1996, the general view was summed up by the view (discussed earlier) that: 'I think it's the ability to negotiate without

coming to that.. I would say they'm weak in the negotiating side if.. they see the only way to win whatever they're after is to strike'. This connects to a continuing negative attitude, towards union power in the 1970s, voiced in 1983 and again today and discussed earlier in the previous section. Employees were adamant that they did not want a return to a situation where, 'If there was no toilet paper in the toilet they'd go on strike.. ridiculous', and 'in the sixties, maybe the unions were too powerful... the strikes were ridiculous at one point'. This echoed similar views in 1983, 'I don't believe in the unions having too much power. I think they can only go so far. I mean, I don't believe in dictating, they take them out on strike if they can't get what they want like the Water Workers. I don't believe in that way at all.'

Pay

With relevance to the earlier discussion about the continued focus on traditional reasons for union membership and an increasing dissatisfaction with levels of pay; success in pay settlements was seen as an important characteristic of union power by most people in 1996/7. Nobody saw this issue as unimportant to union power. Most of these people commented further that they felt that pay was the main concern of members, as one woman remarked, 'I think for most people, that's the main criteria on which they judge the union... they forget about all the side benefits.. like the union's very good on the legal side... but they forget all that like, it's just 'oh we've only got x percent'. Another confirmed, 'People look to the union to get them a good pay rise'. As will be discussed in the next section, however, workers also recognised the difficulties that their union faced in achieving good pay settlements in today's economic and political climate.

Non-traditional benefits

In order to link to the theoretical proposition (as presented in Chapter Two) that non-traditional and more individualistic benefits of union membership have become more

important, employees were asked to assess how important success in things such as common law claims was to whether or not a union was seen as powerful. (This issue was not relevant in 1983, as individual benefits such as legal aid, insurance and financial services were not introduced until 1987, and no person suggested an expectation for such services). The discourse suggests that success in common law claims was seen as an important characteristic of union power by many in 1996. Three people commented further that most members think the common law provision was a good thing to have, but one person, while considering the issue to be important as a characteristic of union power, also stated that it was a difficult issue to gauge because how people felt about it depended on the success of claims. Others felt that this issue was not important, commenting further that common law claims were only a fringe benefit to members and so was not important to the power of a union. This last viewpoint uncovers the level of ambiguity about this possible characteristic of union power. Indeed two people commented specifically that while success in common law claims was a good thing for the union to have, but they did not necessarily feel that this led to increased union power.

This echoes the views of the Convenor who recognised that support in industrial tribunals was an individualistic effort, and did little in terms of building collectivist ideals or in terms of public relations for the union, 'The vast majority of the officials' time is taken up with tribunal work which is primarily about individuals. Any success they have is not publicised because it is a personal and individual matter'³². However, while it may not be seen as contributing to a union's power, complementing findings from earlier studies at the company, people spoke in positive terms about the benefits

³²Meeting with the LockCo Convenor 9th September 1997

offered (especially legal aid and accident insurance), and saw them as part of the modern union package. As a warehouse worker commented, 'For the modern union to survive today, it must offer a wide range of benefits, not only as a collective bargaining force' (Greene, 1995). Many employees in 1996 made comments about the success of the union in representing employees over issues such as hearing loss and industrial disability relating how five people had received a 'pay out' of a quarter of a million pounds in an industrial asthma case in 1995. The union leadership clearly saw success in common law claims as good public relations for the union. Annual Reports are full of claims of how much compensation the union was able to gain for members at industrial tribunals including a total of £345,688 in 1997 (NULMW, 1998).

Political role

Finally, while most of the group in 1996 supported a political role for the union, was this seen as contributing to a union's power and influence? A small minority saw political influence as unimportant to an assessment of a union's power with the only employee who commented further stating that, 'In a lot of cases I don't think what political persuasion you are affects people being a member of the union'. The rest of the group appeared unable to offer a direct response, not being sure how important political influence was. Certainly there was a degree of ambiguity about how political influence affects a union's power. A similar ambiguity was seen with regard to the impact of the TUC. One person commented that while a voice in the TUC was needed, the power of the TUC had declined,

'You've got to have a voice there, but I think in the past the TUC could have been more powerful. Some of its leaders haven't seemed to be leading now. There have been a lot of change with the unions. The unions don't seem to get involved now.....I think the TUC have got a role to play, and could probably be

more high profile'. Others were unsure of how influence in the TUC could contribute to union power either because they did not understand how influence worked in the TUC or because they were not sure what impact it had if a union did hold influence in the TUC.

Summary

An assessment of the influence of contextual change over the period illustrates that overall, there was a shift in what people meant by union power. At the start of the 1980s, employees tended to see union power in terms of the ability of the union to take industrial action. However, in 1996, while ability to strike was seen as an important characteristic of union power, more important characteristics were the success of the union in the work place, specifically over pay, accident claims and with regard to a successful working relationship with management (discussed in greater depth later). Power as 'success in industrial action', has thus become less important than power as, 'success in controlling the agenda of industrial relations' (see Chapter Two). There was also a view that union power has declined significantly over the period, however, this did not equate with them being satisfied with a powerless union in 1996. While over a third of the group in 1983 (both the re-interviews and the wider group) were satisfied with the amount of power their union possessed, this fell to around a tenth in 1996. If workers voiced concern about excessive union power in the past, they were dissatisfied with the present position of unions, as one man remarked, 'well in the sixties, maybe some unions were too powerful, but I think it's been pushed too far the other way like now.'. Almost half of the group desired more power for their union compared to less than a fifth in 1983. Employees wanted more power for the union, not in terms of ability to take industrial action, but to negotiate with management and gain success in pay settlements and accident claims. This reflects the primacy of pay and negotiating ability as reasons for

trade union membership, and members' understanding that the salience of the union with regard to agenda setting has thus increased.

Expectancy and Delivery

The previous sections involved an investigation of trade union saliency in terms of reasons for membership related to perceptions of union influence and potential achievement. The discussion now turns to an investigation of saliency in terms of instrumentality; what members feel that their union is actually able to achieve for them. This is a presentation of findings with relation to members' views of the effectiveness of their union in a variety of work place activities (issues such as pay, conditions, work organisation, job satisfaction and job protection).

Employees in 1996 were asked to comment on the effectiveness of their union over a wide range of activities in the work place. This links directly to the discussion of reasons for membership, which can stand as members' expectations of what their union can do, which can be compared with how effectively they feel their union meets this expectation. This links with the literature discussing the psychological contract and the exchange relationship that exists between a union and its members (See Chapter Two and link to 'specific areas of inquiry' C and D). It should be noted that again, this did not form part of the original agenda in 1983, but information can be gained more generally from these interviews.

Conditions

The traditional concerns of pay and conditions were seen as primary reasons for union membership. In the area of working conditions, no one saw their union as ineffective, with most commenting that, while there were areas that could be improved, the union

was quite effective overall. People commented in general, that conditions were dirty and noisy, but not unsafe (see discussion of conditions, chapter Two). Some felt that improvements could be made, and here the union was seen as valuable in bettering their conditions at work in terms of health and safety. In one case, union involvement was seen as a force for uniformity of policy across all employees, 'getting us overalls and such as that. I know the regulations have come in now, but they (management) could have said, 'Well you need them and you don't', but because of the union being involved, they suddenly said 'We'll give it to everybody'. In another case, an employee alluded to the inferior conditions he had experienced in a previous factory where there was no union recognition: 'I don't think the health and safety committee system is brilliant, but at least we've got one and you can sometimes get things done which is more than I ever had before'.

Similar positive views of the union's effectiveness over conditions were voiced in 1983 with comparisons made between inferior conditions they had experienced in other factories. Only one person was negative about the conditions and he did not blame the union but remarked that there was little that could be done to make the conditions less dirty.

Pay

In the other areas of work place activity however, there were doubts about the success of the union, which increased over the period. Comparison across the period finds that the effectiveness of the union over pay was seen to have declined. Given the poor record of the union over such an important issue in terms of reasons for union membership, one might expect that members would find union membership increasingly irrelevant. However, this does not appear to be the case. In the context of a deteriorating pay situation and job insecurity, lock union members in 1996 believe that their union is more

necessary now than in the early 1980s. LockCo employees in the 1990s had a clear understanding of the restrictions placed upon unions and the difficulties that officials and representatives face in negotiating wages and jobs in a difficult climate. They did not blame the union for the lack of success in pay settlements, but the structure of negotiations within the Joint Industrial Council (JIC). As one tool room worker explained in 1996, 'we always seem to come out a lot worse than we expect... I think it's not so much the union, I think their hands are tied because it's all to do with the JIC.... the smaller companies dictate what the likes of this company can get'. A second commented, 'we are only as effective as the law and legislation allows us to be'. Alternatively, employees pointed to the difficulties that the union faced in negotiating with an unsympathetic and harsh management. The typical viewpoint was outlined by one employee who compared the present situation to that under past management, 'In the past you could negotiate with the company.... now they argue and question the wording of agreements and they seem less honourable people to what they seemed years ago.... we've lost any initiative we had.. you're on the defensive all the while'. The discourse does not suggest that the inability to gain good pay settlements is necessarily seen as the fault of the union or its personnel. Indeed only two people felt that the union was at fault for the unsatisfactory pay settlements in terms of when negotiations took place: 'I always think..... They leave it late to start negotiations', and, 'Well on their side they try hard with negotiations but they don't come back to us with any results till the last minute. If they get themselves into trouble they need to ballot so come to us then'. No others appeared to directly blame the union. Indeed people stated that it was difficult for the union to get good pay rises in the present economic climate, with pay linked to low inflation and the poor job market. There was a view that given the circumstances existing, the union did what it could.

Protecting jobs

A similar grasp of a difficult context was clearly demonstrated in relation to union action over protecting jobs. In 1983, most people were confident in the ability of the union to protect their jobs, with people commenting on how the union had fought to keep the apprentices' jobs and had moved people around rather than see them be made redundant. As one shop steward commented then, 'We have done it in the last two or three years... all our negotiations have been with that... main consideration in everything that is done'. This was particularly significant bearing in mind the high unemployment levels on a national scale, 'I mean we've been very fortunate in this company as far as shedding labour is concerned because a lot of it has been through voluntary redundancy or people retiring. I mean there hasn't been very many people here been seen off, it's all been within the union and been negotiated by unions'.

In 1996, there was some decline in effectiveness noted, where views were split quite evenly. Overall however, the general view from the majority of the group in 1996 was that while the union did not have outstanding success in protecting jobs and preventing redundancies, it did a good job in the circumstances. One worker commented, 'they always seem to make that their main argument in any case, whether it be wages, or general redundancies, when they have come about in the past, they seem to be very effective at protecting jobs as far as they can possibly go'. Another employee alluded specifically to the problems exacerbated by legislation, 'Well that is one area where they've always tried to so much as they could to protect jobs, unfortunately, in some cases, it's been the two years thing where you've got no rights so it's last in first out, and they have to go'.

The two people in 1996 who stated that the union was not effective over job protection did not blame the union, but saw the situation as arising due to the dominance of management in the employment relationship: 'Not effective I'm afraid... nothing's secure today,

you know it's, I mean they try, but at the end of the day, he that pays the piper calls the tune'. This echoed a similar vocabulary that the union 'did what it could' from those in 1983: 'Yes I think they can protect jobs to a point but if the management are adamant that people have got to go and they must go, they I don't think the union would be able to stop them from going, not unless you had a dispute and then everybody's shut. But generally here they look after jobs reasonably well.'.

Job Controls and Work Organisation

One of the substantive indicators of union strength in the workplace has been the issue of job control, where the union has some role in constraining the 'right to manage' over areas of work organisation (Terry, 1986: 173). With regard to the effectiveness of the NULMW at LockCo in this area, very few in 1996 saw their union as effective in terms of work organisation. Nevertheless, they felt that the union did deal with problems of work organisation if they came up and did point out errors to management, such as timing of jobs and being moved around. This was enhanced by the very efficient shop steward organisation that existed in the factory. One man commented further on the increased education of shop stewards and officials,

'We moved from just a group of people in a plant to a very effective shop steward system that is very well educated. Done that through the TUC and GFTU, we have educated our people, and in some cases far superior to the employer. And the other side of it is that we modernised our union. We realised we had got to change so we did. And its become very effective.'.

However, a more dominant view was that the union was not effective over work organisation within the factory. Many did not see the union as having a role in the arena of work organisation at all, as one man commented: 'I'd say they try to but I wouldn't say it was an area where I can comment really. It may have done in the past... you know when the piece work system was set up... but how it does now'. There is some change here from 1983, where there were more positive remarks about the union's ability to have an input into the mobility

of work and issues of the timing of jobs. As two workers commented with regard to the mobility of work:

'If they, the union, weren't there, they'd just be able to shove you over and move you wouldn't they, but with the unions you can say well, you can go to your union and say I was moved last week, why aren't these other three being moved. But if there wasn't a union you couldn't do that could you really'.

'Well I think if you've got any grievances you do take it to the Union but they have got a mobility agreement here where they can move you about, which isn't a bad idea really, if you've got nothing to do all day you are glad to find something you know to make the day go faster'.

Another person commented on the union's input into the work study, 'They have a lot of say in work study. There's some jobs that need re-timing, a new product and we'll go in and say re-time that and unless it's accepted and signed for then they can say, well you know I'm not signing for that and I'll have another study. If they think they're going too slow, they can, the time study can say, well we'll have another operator on there'. Only one person in 1983 explicitly stated that their union was ineffective.

Voice for Employees

Bearing in mind the predominant view that the union was there to give employees a voice, one can see one criteria of assessment of the effectiveness of the union as concerning the nature of communication within the union structure. The most frequently given reason for union membership in 1996 was the need for the union to be a voice for employees. With regard to how the union met this expectation, the majority of the re-interview group felt that the union was at least 'quite effective'. As one man commented, 'They've got a voice through the shop stewards and they make themselves known through the shop stewards. Very effective.... the first thing management come to is the union to find out what's happening'.

A shop steward added in a similar vein, 'The union's always given us the opportunity... to voice our opinions to them through various committees, departmental committees, or, we have a tool room

meeting with the management if there's something to talk about'. Only two people explicitly stated that their union was ineffective in giving them a voice, but more generally, any dissatisfaction with the union's performance stemmed around personal experiences with their shop stewards who they did not feel gave them enough information. One employee pointed out that how effective the union was in terms of giving the members a voice very much depended on the capabilities and activities of the individual shop steward, while another commented that they would like to see more personal communications and less mass meetings. In general therefore, the union was felt to be able to provide a voice for employees, with people who were dissatisfied with their own shop steward being able to achieve satisfactory representation through the convenor or other representative.

Contact and accessibility

The majority of people in 1996 had a positive view of communication channels within the union. People mentioned the accessibility of the union and how the local site of the union made communication easier than in larger unions,

'I think it's the geography of the place that helps more than anything. It is easier, a lot more easier to contact Bellamy House which is situated in Willenhall than it would the AEU' and, 'It's a good little union.. as regards it's a localised place, and with locks, it's a localised thing, so I think you can get things across more easily without having to battle... say with the giants, which seem so remote'.

This was added to by later comments about the accessibility of their union. Many spoke positively about the accessibility of the union, commenting on the ease of communication with officials and the ability for quick action, 'It is a union that's in the dead centre of town and ninety five percent of its members revolve around that centre... it can be called on at any time, it's within easy reach', and 'One of the advantages we have got is that we can go and speak to the general secretary, with most unions you speak to a district officer. We can go and have an interview with someone at head

office quite easily'. No one commented that their union was not accessible. Increasing the flow of information from union representatives to members had been a deliberate policy of the union at national level also. The General Secretary was particularly proud of the efforts that had been made to improve communication, with a regular newsletter introduced in 1988 and new database equipment installed at headquarters and a computer placed in the convenor's office at LockCo.

There was some change in this from 1983 when there were less positive remarks about communication within the union, with many complaining about the lack of information they received from their stewards. Then there was a general feeling that the union was slow to act on the views and opinions of the members. Some commented on the lack of contact that they had with union representatives despite the close accessibility of the union, as one remarked, 'Well we've got a union and we've got the headquarters down Willenhall and I should like to see the union bloke to come, executives or what you call it, I should like to see their faces coming round the Shop floor a bit more than they do. I couldn't tell you who it is. I have no idea'. In addition, there were views that meetings that were held were of little use and discouraged attendance, 'there's little being achieved or can be achieved, the same old ground seems to be gone over at these meetings as has been going over for a long time and there's very little new situations happening so I don't tend to go. It's probably lax of me and I should go'. Others felt ordinary members were excluded from involvement in discussions, including one shop steward who stated,

'Like sometimes they might have a meeting and they'll say this can't be repeated, well it should be repeated because that's what they pay the union for. I usually repeat it. I shouldn't but I do, that's why they elect you as a shop steward to know what's going on, but I think they ought to work it a bit better like that... As I say I think they could pass more information onto the workers. I think that's one of the

reasons why the workers don't get involved. You know, I think half the time they think, well they can't be bothered to tell you anything so we won't ask.'

There was a significant decrease in dissatisfaction by the late 1990s, with any negative remarks focusing on personal experiences. One person commented that their personal shop steward was not good at communication and information-giving and that they relied on a shop steward in another department rather than their own. This was added to by another employee, who while being quite satisfied personally with the amount of communication, did state that it depended very much on the individual shop steward. Other respondents were not satisfied with the amount of information that they received from their shop steward, with regard to such things as notes from committee meetings: 'What I don't like is that they don't seem to tell you a lot'. For one woman, this was particularly true compared to the information she had given out as a shop steward. Another employee did not feel that there was enough personal contact between reps and members, 'They listen and that's as far as it goes. But them coming to me as a member is very limited'.

Representativeness and accountability

While there were some limited expressions of dissatisfaction with the level of communication within the union, views on the representativeness and accountability of the union tended to support the generally positive view of the union in 1996. Most workers felt that their union did represent their interests well and that union action did reflect their opinions, channelled through the shop stewards. An emphasis on the need for the union to remain accountable was apparent in the recognition by the convenor, that he had made a mistake when he had neglected to offer a ballot on the pay settlement

to a company site in Birmingham ³³. While there were only fifty people at the site so their ballot would not have made impact on the result of the wider poll, he realised that it had been a mistake not to offer them a ballot on principle and was going to the site to make a formal apology and listen to the complaints made by members. Only a few felt that their opinions and views did not always get through. One man felt that the union officials could act faster on issues than they did, while others commented further that this was because the union officers tended to decide things separately from the ordinary members, so that they did not feel that they had a chance to get involved in the decision making process,

' I think they tend to er, discuss among themselves what they feel is the right thing and then they come back to us, not always, the situation, but they often come back after they've made some sort of decision. 'Well we thought it was in your best interests', and it's a bit too late then. It's already been done then hasn't it?'.

Another added to this by stating that the union officials did not seem to act in the best interests of union members at certain times: 'Well to a degree, I think we're held by Bellamy House, the General Secretary, his way at times, so no not always. Because they've opposed some of the things that we thought maybe better. Getting rid of and putting something different in its place. So they have resisted that, it hasn't always fulfilled what the membership wants at LockCo'.

In addition, one person who saw the union as representative and accountable, also commented that his experience as a representative on the health and safety committee had indicated that some of the opinions and views of members were not channelled through because, 'I must admit you do act as a filter, and I presume that the shop stewards act as a filter because some of the things people ask you are just mind boggling' .

³³ Meeting with the LockCo Convenor 9th October 1997.

The union at LockCo retains a strong institutional position, where there was still a shop steward organisation of sixteen, broadly representing one steward for each department or work group area, as there was from the early 1970s. The increased salience of and satisfaction with the union from the point of view of workers at LockCo, can be seen to derive from deliberate strategies at national union level, where officials have placed an emphasis on the union being more representative in the workplace. The full time officials indicated that while the recessions were seen as having lesser impact in terms of union strategy, the anti-union legislation, particularly that removing the protection of law from employees was seen as important. Both the General Secretary and the President had been involved in the lock union throughout the 'boom years' of the 1970s and the 'union decline years' of the 1980s. The first area of change that was mentioned was the style of leadership. Both felt that the union had become more aware of and responsive to the needs and expectations of members. As the General Secretary remarked, 'I think we're more aware of the needs of our members. I mean in the past where yes, we could sit back and say 'that's it, take it or leave it', knowing darn well they've got to stick with it or they could lose their job. I think there's more awareness of what the members want now'. The convenor had deliberately aimed to increase the flow of information to members³⁴. One of the senior shop stewards produced what have come to be known as 'John's unofficial minutes' of the shop stewards' committee meeting, which were pinned up on the company notice board as soon as the meeting ends, preceding distribution of the official minutes later in the week. The convenor was also concerned that union representatives were seen as accountable to membership and were not seen to be hiding information from members. The convenor specifically told shop stewards at a meeting that they should never act secretively, 'We are

³⁴ Can be connected to the tactics for decreasing the level of intra-organisational conflict and increase the level of consensus between union leader and rank and file. Many of the procedures of the tactical assignments are based around issues of communication and the manipulation of information giving (Walton and McKersie, 1965: 312-340)

not a secret society, we will not say 'No comment', but whenever we can, we will give as much information as we are able to and if any members have any queries beyond that, they should come and speak to me'. The union at LockCo also attempted to be representative of members' views. The proceedings of committee meetings were full of comments, inquiries and questions from the rank-and-file membership, indicating how the opinions of ordinary members were filtered through to the representative bodies (Cohen and Fosh, 1988). Sometimes, shop stewards specifically commented that they did not agree with this particular person's view, but felt that the committee should hear what they had to say. The convenor also made a point of delegating important issues to the shop stewards. One example was the formation of a sub-committee to negotiate new holiday arrangements. Moreover, the shop stewards were a check on the convenor taking on too much by himself. At one committee meeting, a shop steward said he thought the convenor was overworked and should set up a sub-committee to deal with the redundancy negotiations; the setting up of which has since occurred.

It is more difficult to assess the views of workers in 1983 with regard to the representativeness and accountability of the union because these were not issues directly addressed. There were some broad comments relating to how representative the union was with people commenting positively about their convenor (now General Secretary):

'When he goes to a meeting he comes back and gives us a good picture you know, not only snippets of what he wants to say which happens with some shop stewards, he gives us a full picture of what's going on and listens and discusses, and he's a good man for the job'. Another added how the last convenor had resigned when he felt his views were no longer representative of the majority, 'His reason was that he had entered into a discussion with management and what he thought was the right and correct way to do it and where it was representative of people's best interest and it met with a disagreement of the shop stewards committee generally and as he felt he was no longer representing their views.'

Another commented on how the union always tried to get an adequate representation of each company at the national wage negotiations, 'this executive body that we have about four representatives from here but they always try to keep the numbers equally, male and female, then you get this executive formed from all companies then. Then from that, they then have a negotiating committee on wages and conditions'. However, there were some more negative remarks with regard to the accountability of the union (those who commented were dissatisfied, however it must be noted that these expressions of dissatisfaction were very few in comparison to the lack of comment on this issue). Quite a few members felt that their union in 1983 was not really accountable to their views. There was an impression that policy was made at EC level and the rank and file were expected to go along with it having had little say of their own. As one man commented, 'It's against the members in the union, shop stewards who go to shop stewards meetings and just you know..... stick their hand up and accept things and then when you've come out, .. some of the shop stewards have come in to me and said what was all that about? It's amazed me because they've been to a meeting, different things have been put forward and they've voted and they've accepted it'.

One person was particularly upset about the lack of input that ordinary members had when the cost of living supplement was abolished in 1981, 'there are some things that are done within the union which we have no control over, such as when they/we used to have an index linked, we used to have a cost of living agreement, well our cost of living agreement was signed away by the union and we never had a vote on it. It was discussed by the union executive and everybody else and it was taken away... I think we should have had a vote on that because it was our money they were talking about.'

Trust

In an identical way to those sections relating to management, in the 1996 interviews, I included the topic of trust, which was not specifically included in the earlier studies.

This was to build a more detailed picture of the worker-union relationship. Interviewees were asked to describe the level of overall trust that they felt existed between the union and the shop floor. The issue of trust connects both to instrumental views concerning the ability and effectiveness of the union and to espoused sentiments of loyalty to, pride in, and shared values with the union.

A large majority of the group had positive views of the level of trust between the union and workers, with most stating that the level of trust was 'good'. An interesting remark from one man, pointed to the instrumental way in which people assessed the union, 'Well they tend to blame the union as well for not getting these things, it's double edged that is, management would be trying to get them to accept what they're saying, to get them off the hooks at the smallest possible cost, and of course they've already seen the union who haven't achieved for them, so yes that's poor as well in these cases'. In general however, there was a lot of mutual support within the workplace union organisation. Despite the changes proposed by the new management at LockCo in 1998, (particularly bearing in mind the scale of the restructuring which had already occurred at KeyCo), the general atmosphere at the shop steward's committee meetings was cheery and optimistic. This did not seem to be because people were any happier about the proposals than they were at KeyCo. Indeed, stewards were very concerned about the scale of planned redundancies and the impact of the abolition of piecework on earnings. However, there appeared to be confidence that the union, particularly in the form of the convenor would fight for the best interests of the workers. As one female shop steward remarked, 'So the situation is, we're not going to let [the multinational] come into LockCo like they did at KeyCo, we're not going to let them roll over the union'. The convenor recognised that members are anxious about the proposed changes and worried for their jobs. The message that he was aiming to get across to his shop stewards was the need for them to present a united front in order to instil confidence into the

members; 'We must remain upbeat and optimistic about things. If you all have a depressed attitude, it will not achieve anything for the members'. The need for the union to remain optimistic and positive in public was also a recurring theme in the convenor's diary entries. For example, following the official announcement of redundancies on the 10th October 1997, he wrote,

By the time I arrived back at the main LockCo site, stunned members were returning from the meetings. And at both [other sites] which were to be closed, the mood was extremely sombre. Mental Note: I must get to both factories as soon as possible- we must be positive- job losses can and will be achieved by voluntary means.

Four days later, the same sentiment was emphasised and the convenor felt that the union had to boost morale for both workers and managers in the factory,

Once again the morale at this factory is very low. Both the workers and the managers felt concerned with regard to their future and once again it was up to us to be positive. Being positive in this context is all about being clear, members want answers and we should be able to provide that service.

The confidence and optimism of the convenor was quite infectious at the meetings and often led to a rallying around of support behind the union. When discussing tactics for opposing a new redundancy scheme, the shop stewards engaged in some morale boosting, with one steward proclaiming his support for the convenor shouting 'We'll follow you to the end of the road', which was followed by clapping and cheering across the room. In a similar way, there is evidence of support from the convenor to his shop stewards, as a diary entry of 22nd October 1997 reveals,

Quite clearly the most important group I must convince of the need to be positive is my shop stewards. Whether or not their minds, as with everyone else's are focused on the present situation, the meeting today was extremely helpful and there were many good contributions. This interest must be encouraged and

developed and to this aim I intend to involve as many of them as I can over the next few weeks, it gives me personally a great deal of pride, in the way they have adapted to the role of shop steward.

Summary

Looking specifically at an assessment of the influence of contextual change over the period, although the union was seen as having an important role in policing uniformity of treatment, its effectiveness was limited in most areas. Indeed, apart from conditions, the union was felt to be less effective over all areas in 1996 than in 1983. However, given the clear appreciation of the constraints upon union effectiveness, both within the organisation and in the external environment, coupled with the employees' sense of vulnerability, the union was perceived as rather more valuable today than in the early 1980s. In addition, the union had made important improvements in terms of meeting members' expectations with regard to communication, representativeness and accountability. Members were far more satisfied in 1996 than in 1983 with the workings of union democracy in the workplace. This was reflected in the high level of trust felt to exist between employees and the union, which stands in stark comparison to the discussion of trust between employees and management discussed in Section One. Again, these themes will be returned to in the discussion of the impact of specific differences in structures and strategies at KeyCo.

Identities

Other areas of discussion in the interviews gave extra information about the way in which workers viewed the relative positions of themselves and the union within the company. Complementing the strong feeling of 'them and us' espoused by workers (see Section One), a third of the re-interview group also acknowledged that a 'them and us'

situation existed where the 'us' was seen as representing the union. In general, there was a more positive view of the union than of the identical questions relating to management and the company.

No one in 1996 commented that they did not feel a sense of loyalty to the union although one man commented that his loyalty to the union had declined over the period. This was complemented by a similar view that people felt a sense of pride in their union. As one shop steward commented, 'I feel proud that people come to me to ask my opinions and to for my support and representation, and that I am a member of the union executive, yes'. One woman however felt that you did not need to be proud of your union, 'Don't come into it really. You are either a member or you're not a member'.

In comparison to the identical question asked with regard to the company, almost everyone thought that they shared union values and objectives. In addition, everyone agreed that the union saw the interests of the workers as important. One employee commented on the support the union offered, '..if I had a case going.. I know they'd fight tooth and nail to help me'. Another pointed out the efforts that the union made to get the opinions of workers, 'I think the union do try to take on board everything that filters back to them through all the members, to try and accommodate what they want, and to try and give them a good union, you know. they do try, they have tried different venues and things to make people more interested in, but take the AGM, there's the usual hundred what turns up every year out of five thousand, they're just lethargic about it because it's that close, they rely on someone else to tell them all the while you see.'

Bringing together employees' views of their feelings of identity with both the company (and management) which was discussed in Section One, and with the union, was the point in the 1996 interviews where the issue of dual identity was discussed. Only one person in 1996 stated that they felt more of a sense of identity with the company than the

union, and this was seen to be based primarily around the issue of wages. As this person commented, 'it's the company that pay the wages and not the union so even if you don't agree with what the company does, you have to identify with it.'. However, more people stated that they felt more of a sense of identity with the union.

Many people found it difficult to place their feelings of identity, indeed one person stated that they identified with neither organisation, three people did not know, and one foreman commented on the difficulty of saying which organisation he felt more identity with as he felt that he 'wore two hats'. Views were fairly split over the issue of whether it was possible to identify with and be loyal to, both the company and the union at the same time. A large minority felt that dual identity was not possible, with typical comments being, 'The two are in total conflict', and, 'you can't have a foot in both camps'. It was obviously a complex and difficult issue and the discourse of many people was ambiguous and contradictory. A similar number of people felt that dual loyalty was possible, however, the discourse did suggest that loyalty and identification with the union was different to that of management. For example as one tool room worker stated, 'You can be loyal to a union but of necessity you have to be loyal to the management. It's a different kettle of fish, the money that supports you comes from the management, the social side comes from the union'. This view was shared by another, 'The union is here to help you if you have problems, but at the end of the day the company pay your wages'. The discourse seems to suggest that there was more of an obligation in loyalty to the company, particularly as it was the company that paid the wages. On the other hand loyalty and identification with the union was seen as somewhat more voluntary and based around a more reciprocal relationship, as one man commented, 'I think you have to be loyal to both of them, but you have to look after your union 'cause your union looks after you'. There was a somewhat more prominent feeling of identity with the union than with the company.

There is an interesting contradiction apparent here however, as while there appeared to be an overwhelmingly positive attitude towards the union and the benefits of the NULMW, more people felt that they could be a member of another union, than those who felt they could only be a member of the NULMW. Some felt that they could not be a member of another union, because the company would not recognise another union but did state that his preference would be a larger union. The other person who commented further stated that they would be happy to join another union in a different situation, out of the lock industry but while continuing to recognise the relevance of the NULMW in his particular work context. Finally, the most impressive endorsement of the need for the union came in the fact that all the group agreed that things would have been worse for employees without the union. As one female assembler commented, 'I think they would yes.... at one time when it was a closed shop, the unions did rule a lot stronger than what they do now, but it don't mean to say they're no good. Still got their faults but I would never drop out'.

Summary at LockCo

In this assessment of the influence of change over time at LockCo, the aim was to look specifically at the impact of change in the local context ('specific area of inquiry' A), and in the wider context ('specific area of inquiry' B) and how this impacted upon perceptions of commitment and trust ('specific areas of inquiry' C and D). There was a generally positive view of the union organisation at LockCo in 1996. With regard to the specific areas to be investigated with regard to the wider context, the union has increased in salience, particularly in the context of an unfavourable economic climate and deteriorating relationship with management. In addition, while there was less willingness to go on strike in the 1990s, there was more support for the rights of unions to take industrial action and have a wider social and political role. There was increased

satisfaction with the workings of union democracy and people find their union to be far more representative and accountable than they did in 1983. While there was a view that union effectiveness in the workplace has declined, there was also a clear appreciation of the constraints faced by the union and given this, there was a desire for an increased union role over certain activities in the workplace. Similarly, while the union was seen as less powerful in 1996 than in the early 1980s, the discourse suggested that people wanted their union to have more power over the agenda of collective bargaining. There was a high level of trust, loyalty and pride in the union organisation and a greater feeling of identification with the union than with the company. This gradual change within overall continuity of attitude will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Five. Now the Chapter moves on to look at the contemporaneous comparison with KeyCo, investigating whether the overall continuity in attitude and positivity towards the workplace union, was a consequence of specific differences in union/management policy or was characteristic of a wider view across the industrial community.

Comparison with KeyCo

This section presents the general orientation of workers' views towards the union at KeyCo in order to make a comparison with the foregoing findings from LockCo. Exactly similar issues are highlighted here; the salience of a collective organisation, the nature of collectivism, union influence and power, expectations and experience of union effectiveness and level of identification with the union. However here, an emphasis is placed on investigating the impact of specific differences in organisation, structure and policy of both management and union between the two companies, on attitudes and perceptions of the union. This investigation takes place in light of the foregoing findings from the LockCo study

Salience of membership

The most striking finding when the two companies were compared, was the degree of negativity towards the union demonstrated at KeyCo. Some employees even went so far as to state that they did not know why they bothered continuing to be union members. As one shopfloor worker commented, 'I sometimes wonder why myself. I don't think I do derive any benefit from it to tell you the truth', while another added: 'Well I don't know why anyone bothers, they've never done anything for we'. This is in contrast to LockCo, where most saw their union as relevant and necessary. For instance, workers at KeyCo were as dissatisfied with their levels of pay as those at LockCo, and this dissatisfaction was exacerbated by the failure of the new bonus scheme which had only triggered a bonus (at the lowest level) six times in the twenty months it has been in place. While at LockCo, dissatisfaction with pay and wider economic instability had led to pay remaining a primary reason for membership of the union, at KeyCo, only two people felt similarly.

Workers did not see the union as having a role in negotiating pay within the restructured firm.

Perhaps the most damning views of the union at KeyCo were those which saw the union as supporting management rather than the workers. Indeed, a prevalent viewpoint was that the union was on management's side. Common views included, 'I've always thought this union was in the hands of management'... and... 'Before the union was behind the workers but now the union seems to be something more management'. Another commented, 'The union, especially here, is being run by the company... the union bend the rules to suit the company, not the workers'.. and finally, 'I mean they're in their pockets'. One member at KeyCo even thought that the union had been bribed by management with shop stewards having been given higher paying jobs: 'most of the shop stewards here, for some reason, they all got put on a grade two, to keep them quiet, so they can say 'Your pay's higher than everyone else's'. Well they've got them over a barrel'. Relating back to the theoretical debates, the workers at KeyCo appeared to have an impression that their union leaders and representatives were incorporated into the management world view (Chapter Two), and have demonstrated this through agreeing to policies which they see as undermining their interests. The gap between the views of the convenor at KeyCo and those of the rank and file was evident. The convenor supported restructuring, feeling that they would yield significant gains for employees. As she commented, 'I want to change, I like the changes and I think we're changing for the right. Whereas the shopfloor want stopping with the piece work and are quite happy how we used to be. I think they see me in management's purse at the minute.. because I'm convinced we're going the right way... I'll stick it out and prove it to them that I'm right'. Moreover, the convenor was frustrated with the rank and file's opposition to the re-structuring, 'all they'm interested in is gloom and doom I lose patience with them, they talk so much rot most of the time. It's not that they've got a genuine reason for not wanting the move, it's just cos' they want to do their job... There's no pleasing them to be honest'. In

contrast, her members felt that the union has 'sold us down the river' and is reflected in their opinions of the union as being 'on management's side'.

Interviews with KeyCo managers also revealed a perception that the union was 'on their side' which complemented views from employees. The Engineering Manager stated that the relationship was, 'one of those lovely pictures where they're all holding hands, the union's loyalty is with the company'. The Operations Director alluded similarly to a unitarist view of the company and union's interests, 'Our union is very progressive.. and understands what is required.. the union agenda is the same as the company agenda'. While the convenor was adamant that her loyalties are with the union and the working class movement and would have problems with the appellation of 'our union' by management, the Operations Director's words reflected the convenor's own views of the restructuring process. This was mirrored in the convenor's positive remarks about the attempts of the company to inform and consult with the employees: 'They'd [the workforce] say they weren't involved, but the company.. did their best to inform.. the management did try and get people fully involved'. The separation between the views of the convenor and the rank and file was emphasised in that the managers themselves were not convinced of the two-way process of involvement between the company and employees. It is worth comparing this last comment from the convenor with those of managers at KeyCo (See Section One).

The convenor was similarly critical of her shop stewards and did not feel confident in delegating duties to them, relating past experiences where, according to her, they were unable to carry out fairly simple duties. The convenor at LockCo also noted this lack of delegation by the KeyCo convenor, commenting that full time officer's reports indicated that a lot of their time is taken up by dealing with domestic issues at KeyCo which would have been passed onto shop stewards to deal with. Furthermore, the convenor at KeyCo

appeared unwilling to use her shop stewards for the purposes of information dissemination, as she stated, 'We do Photostat the minutes but any major issues I prefer to announce them myself because I just can't trust them to get the message across in the right way'. It would appear then, that members systematically had information filtered by the convenor. There were thus, clear differences between the workers at each company, with regard to attitudes about the nature of the union/management relationship. The aim of the concluding Chapter Five is to try and make sense of these differences in attitude within a framework of the dismantling of paternalism and the "drama of negotiation".

Union Influence and Power

In looking at the comments more closely, the dissatisfaction about the union at KeyCo focused around views that the union was powerless to help them, with a general view the union had lost all power over the period from the early 1980s. While overall, what are seen as characteristics of union power were quite similar, the view that the union was not powerful was far more prevalent at KeyCo. Issues that were specifically mentioned as demonstrating this lack of power included the inadequacy of union influence over the recent pay settlement (where a new bonus scheme was introduced which significantly reduced many employees' wages), and over redundancies (KeyCo has experienced about 1000 redundancies over the past ten years). Indeed, one worker had decided not to become a member of the lock union when he joined the company because of the lack of job protection the union could offer: 'I think it's a waste of time.. I mean what can they do? If they sack me tomorrow, they'll not get me my job back... so ever since then I've thought sod it. I mean you're paying one pound whatever it is a week, it's a waste of time'.

Effectiveness in the workplace

There were similar views espoused by employees at both companies with regard to the limited effectiveness of the union over areas such as pay, work organisation and protecting jobs. However, the opinion was generally lower at KeyCo, indeed more people saw the union as 'not effective' or 'quite effective' at KeyCo than at LockCo. The two areas where the most significant differences in attitude were noted were in areas of protecting jobs (discussed below) and in terms of giving a voice to employees (discussed in the next subsection). Very few people at KeyCo rated their union as 'effective' or 'very effective' with regard to these two issues compared to half of workers at LockCo. Most workers at LockCo were as pessimistic about the ability of the union to protect their jobs as they were at KeyCo, but most indicated that they recognised the difficulty the union faced. This was in contrast to views from employees at KeyCo where only two people thought the union did all that it could. One worker at KeyCo commented typically, 'At one time, the union used to fight for redundancies, now the company says 'Ten people are being made redundant' and the next week they're out the door, never see the union step in now.'

This lack of effectiveness also was reflected in the weakened institutional position of the union at KeyCo. While there was still a strong shop steward network at LockCo, at KeyCo, the shop steward network was significantly depleted. There were only five shop stewards servicing the workforce. Even taking into account the significant reduction of the workforce at KeyCo, the union at LockCo still had three times as many representatives per employee. The personal working relationship between convenor and Personnel Director at KeyCo had also deteriorated, perhaps explained by the series of five short lived take-overs of the company in the 1980s. This relates to the declining contact with and accessibility to managers that was voiced in the last section. As the ex-Convenor commented, 'Who do you negotiate with, who do you go and see, with all these different

managements?'. In addition, while the convenor continued to hold a full time position at LockCo, there had been a loss of status at KeyCo where the convenor now worked full time on the shop floor, (although management agree to the taking of time off for union duties as and when is necessary). The union at KeyCo had thus come to occupy a less central and weakened institutional position in recent years.

Communication, representativeness and accountability

With regard to opinions of communication channels within the union and views of how accountable and representative the union is, once again, a significant divergence in attitudes at the companies was identified. In general, members at KeyCo were not satisfied with the level of communication that they had with their union representatives and officials and the amount of information they receive about union business. There appeared to be a common experience indicated by workers at KeyCo, with many people commenting on how they felt that shop stewards 'fobbed them off', alluding to a feeling that union business was kept secret from members. As members related, 'They have their monthly meetings, but nine times out of ten, you hear things through hearsay... you go and ask the union and they say 'Oh we don't know'..... 'can't. It's still a secret'..... you ask them and they say 'Well we don't know'. This was in comparison to most at LockCo who had positive things to say about the communication process within the lock union. Looking more closely at the substantive content of comments about the communication process within the union, complaints from members at LockCo did not focus around the same kinds of issues as at KeyCo. At LockCo, the few who were not satisfied, complained about individual shop stewards or the fact that their own stewards did not go out of their way to come and tell them things. At KeyCo, the substance of dissatisfaction is different. Here members

complained that even if they went to their stewards themselves and asked specifically for information, they did not receive it; they felt shut out from the process.

A similar situation existed with regard to the issue of how accountable the union is to members. Again, the balance of opinion was much more negative at KeyCo than at LockCo. Most of the members at KeyCo did not feel that their views are reflected in union action, compared to only one member at LockCo. Many at KeyCo felt that union representatives and officials had their own opinions and made decisions without regard to members' views, as one person commented,

'In times gone past... the union used to come back and say to the shopfloor, 'We've received a proposal from the management and we put it to you on the shopfloor', it was up to the shopfloor to accept that or reject it. But they seem to forget that now, it's already decided', Another added, 'I don't know where they get their ideas from... it was something they'd thought off the top of their heads, they want it, asked for it, and got it, but nobody's asked for it. I think that's a lack of co-ordination between the union and the workforce'.

Connected to a view of how accountable and representative the union was seen to be, were feelings of distrust towards the union. In parallel with the negativity of other views, the level of trust was seen as much lower at KeyCo than at LockCo. While four fifths of workers at LockCo felt that the level of trust within the union was 'good', more than half of workers at KeyCo felt that the level of trust was 'pretty poor' or 'very poor'. As one assembly worker at KeyCo commented, 'I think that's gone down a lot.. the union is the workers. So because they don't look after everyone else's back nobody trusts anybody else'. Even the union Convenor at KeyCo commented on the lack of trust that existed between her and the members and felt that this was due to the amount of restructuring and change that the company had undergone over the last five years

Nature of collectivism and traditional values

Wider social and political role

Discussion of the general salience of union membership also connects to views about a wider cause of unionism, such as for the union to have a social and political role outside of the workplace. Again, divergence between the two companies was clear. Whereas most workers at LockCo supported the right for a union to have a wider political role, there was less unequivocal support at KeyCo. Reasons given for why the union should not have a wider role however, were similar at each company, with views focusing around the need for the union to concentrate on workplace issues, as one worker at KeyCo commented, 'When I vote the government in, they should run the country, not the union'³⁵. A similar unwillingness for the union to have a wider political role is seen in the fact that only one person at KeyCo felt that unions should affiliate to political parties. Thus, not only did workers at KeyCo find union membership of little benefit to them in terms of demonstrable effectiveness in the workplace, but they also did not feel that unions have a salient role to play outside of the workplace.

Right to take industrial action

The salience of union membership also involves questions regarding members' opinions about 'traditional' union rights to strike. Are people willing to mobilise support behind the union, and is industrial action seen as a salient weapon of union membership? At LockCo, every person indicated their support for the principle of a right to strike. In comparison, at KeyCo, there was not such unequivocal support. While most members voiced their support, a quarter did not support the right to strike. The views against

industrial action stemmed primarily from feelings that striking does not accomplish anything for the workers; indeed many gave examples of where they had lost out when they had gone on strike, 'Striking, I don't think it accomplishes anything.... in the end, it's the workers who suffer'... and... 'It's no good striking these days, everybody is in the same boat and the strike will not do anyone any good'. Two people voiced a unitarist view that striking was unfair to the company, as one commented, 'what right have we got to say 'Lay tools down'? They're paying your money, they're doing you a favour really'. In addition, many people at KeyCo thought that people would not show support for industrial action (albeit as a last resort) compared to only one person at LockCo. The reasons offered for this lack of support included the barriers of legislation mentioned at LockCo in 1996, but also referred back to the older issues seen in 1983 at LockCo of the predominantly female workforce (who were seen as less militant), fear of losing jobs and lack of collective feeling. Two workers related a recent demonstration of the lack of support for the union, when industrial action was proposed over the pay settlement, 'The union man, he got everyone together and he says 'Right, before I can do anything at all, what I want is a show of hands to see who would be willing to take industrial action'.... I reckon a quarter of hands went up.... I'm afraid the old people power for the union wasn't there'.

The other commented similarly.... 'We had a meeting about them taking the money off these people and the union came down, they had us all outside to talk about it, but they hadn't got a hundred percent backing so of course they couldn't do anything about it. A union is only as good as its members'.

Identities

Most workers at LockCo said they were proud to be members of the union compared to only one person at KeyCo, with the majority remarking that they were not proud. In

³⁵This vocabulary was matched by a worker at LockCo: "I just don't see where they come into the running of the country, unions".

addition, while almost all workers at LockCo agreed that they shared similar values to those of union representatives, only a minority at KeyCo felt similarly. Finally, while at LockCo, almost all workers agreed strongly with the view that employees would have been far worse off without their union, views at KeyCo were far more equivocal, with some claiming that their union had made very little difference to their working environment over the period. The lack of identity with the union was also reflected in the fact that while the existence of a 'them and us' situation at KeyCo was as predominant as at LockCo, this was seen as management against employees. When people were asked whether they felt a 'them and us' situation existed which involved management against the union, only one person felt that this phrase applied to KeyCo compared to a large minority at LockCo.

In comparison to LockCo, and remaining consistent with the generally negative views of the union at KeyCo, nobody felt that they had more of a sense of identity and loyalty with the union than with the company. As one person commented, 'no working class feeling, the union have not done anything for me'. However, it should be noted that there was also little suggestion of large scale identity with the company to balance this. Only two people stated that they felt more of an identity with the company, and this was certainly where the employee made a differentiation between the company and management. Her identification with the company was based on her long service, 'I've always loved [KeyCo], I wouldn't have worked here twenty five years if I didn't would I?... I identify more with the company'. There was also not the ambivalence at KeyCo which was suggested by the discourse of workers at LockCo with regard to the possibilities of dual identity. The majority of the group felt that it was possible to be loyal to and identify with, both the union and the company at the same time, with only two people seeing them as in conflict, with identification with one leading to decreased identification with the other.

Summary and Comparison

On all of the issues relating to opinions of the union, the workplace union organisation at KeyCo was viewed consistently more unfavourably than at LockCo. Members indicated very negative views of the structures and processes of union democracy at KeyCo compared to LockCo. At KeyCo, this involved the existence of a situation where there was a significant divergence between the values and goals of the union leaders and the lay membership, and where members felt very little trust in their union. Relating back to a theme from Chapter Two, there appears to have been a perception that the nature of the psychological contract between the union and its members had been transformed. This divergence in attitudes was somewhat unexpected, as one might anticipate that views would be similar bearing in mind the small size and community-based nature of the union, and the historical and sociological similarities between the firms. To prepare for later analysis, these findings highlight the significance of the comparison between LockCo and KeyCo in indicating ways in which the perceptions of commitment and trust and consequently; union leadership, the bargaining relationship and “drama of negotiation” could be affected by significant change within managerial structure and strategy³⁶. This flags up a key theme of the later analysis, that the issue is not so much one of the union co-operating with management, but that there are clear employee perceptions about the terms of this co-operation/engagement (related to the psychological contract), where the ‘structured antagonisms’ which form part of the employees’ view of the employment relationship clearly emerged. These ideas are discussed in depth in Chapter Five.

³⁶ Informed partly by personal communication with Mike Terry, February, 1999.

Chapter Four: Section Three. 'Us': The Workers

This section presents the third part of the account of views from the shopfloor as set out in Chapter One . It is an attempt to unpack the concept of 'them and us' recognising the fact that workers are not a homogenous group, and that their interests are necessarily the same as that of the union. This relates to the discussion in Chapter Two where it was pointed out that the model of two-fold commitment to either union or company may only be an industrial caricature (and relates to 'specific areas of inquiry' C and D). 'Them and us' attitudes may be seen as more wide ranging and the pattern of relationships in the workplaces studied needs to be more closely examined. The previous two sections have established that lock workers perceive there to be a 'them and us' situation based around union and management parties. However, the area of interest in this chapter is to look more closely at what groups make up 'us'. Do workers have alternative identities and solidarity with other social groups in the workplace? The longitudinal aspect is brought in, by exploring if there were points over the period when these identities and attachments differed and the possible reasons for these differences. These longitudinal findings at LockCo are then compared with the views of workers at KeyCo to investigate whether specific differences in management and union policy and organisation impact upon employee attitudes and perceptions. Finally, a summary of the findings is made.

Views from the shopfloor at LockCo

In this section, the findings are explored with respect to worker's views of which groups on the shop floor they identify with. Again there was some difficulty of direct comparison because this did not form a direct part of the interview agenda in the earlier

research, however, information could be gained from a more wider reading of the interviews.

Shared Identity

A large minority in 1996/7 re-interview group did not feel that they shared a sense of identity with others on the shopfloor. This complements the finding discussed in Section One, where there is little change across the period in the view of the company as a mass of individuals. There was a general view that feelings of solidarity and shared identity had declined since they had been working at LockCo, as one person remarked, 'No,... over the years it has changed. It's the people really... you find a difference with the people that they bring in to how we used to be... people like to get in their own little groups and don't want to know'

Perhaps the more interesting finding however came from most of the group who felt that they shared a sense of identity with other employees. However, this was not a shared identity as a group of employees, but illustrated the complex nature of 'us' in the workplace. The most prevalent shared identity was with the work group in their department. As one employee illustrated, there could be a different interpretation to 'them and us', 'There seems to be a them and us situation, as far as the automatics and the press shop... when it comes down to making decisions about action of any sort about anything, it's a them and us situation'. This included two foremen who commented that their status and position in the hierarchy distinguished them from the rest of the shopfloor. The work group was a significant grouping in 1983 also, with people identifying with others as tool setters, tool makers, the press shop, and assemblers.

Other splits within the work place in 1996 were also apparent, including a gender division. Two men commented on the extent to which working with a large group of men made work a more sociable activity than if they worked with women, 'It's all men,

which.. is acceptable to the majority of us.... we'd rather work with men, than sort of with men and women.. it's a good atmosphere'. Equally, one woman commented that her work was not a social activity because she was working among the men, and that if she had more women about, work would be more sociable. A gender split was also noted in 1983, in similar terms to the vocabulary of 1996. The work was seen as more sociable and friendly depending on the gender mix, as one female expediter commented, 'I prefer to work with men.. they aren't catty like women'. Others saw this gender division as affecting the willingness and ability of people to take industrial action, as one man commented, 'you do get the schism between male and female at times. If you want to go for a strike and you have got two thirds of the population are female rather than male you don't get a strike. You only get a strike if its male dominated.'

There was also an element of divisions caused by the gender segregation of jobs in the factory. While it did not form a pervading theme of discussions, it was interesting to highlight, particularly as it has formed a theme of other shopfloor studies (Cockburn, 1991, 1983). As Cockburn found, there appeared to be a taken for granted assumption that certain types of work, most notably at LockCo, assembling and packing were seen as a female preserve. The division in the workplace between the 'automatics and the press shop' discussed above, also meant a division between men and women, with the 'automatics' being almost entirely a female preserve, while there were no women in the tool room or female apprentices coming along to fill such jobs³⁷. This was often rationalised on the shopfloor by notions of gender-differentiated physical abilities. For example men stating that they did not have small enough fingers to deal with the intricate work demanded of assembling a lock. One tool maker commented that while women

³⁷ Similar segregation of the shopfloor along gender lines was found in the carpet (Ackers, 1988), and the footwear industry (Goodman et al, 1977).

were undertaking training for all sorts of jobs today (and he did not want to offend me personally as a professional woman!), 'somehow it never seems right to people of my age. It didn't seem right that the females should be hammering and crashing away. Do you know what I'm trying to get at.... men couldn't have done the jobs that women did do... the dexterity of their fingers and their application to doing that job was much more quick and definite than I could ever have achieved'. When I asked one man if he had to assemble the locks that he made the components for, he seemed quite aghast and stated, 'We [my emphasis] don't assemble them. The girls assemble and spray them'. When asked if people would like to change anything about their jobs, the issue of taking on a job customarily held by the other sex was never an issue. There was no suggestion of a desire to end the gender segregation of jobs. From the limited evidence that exists, there appears to be little change over the period with regard to this issue. In 1983, one man spoke in very similar terms about the gender segregation of jobs appearing to be right and proper,

'We did try an experiment with a guy about six weeks ago.. he needed a job and the sex equality being bandied about these days a lot, so they tries him on [assembling] but he wasn't suitable.. he just wasn't dextrous enough.... they're small you know, and you've got to keep these things, I don't know how they do it, but some of these women do and they're quite happy.... if they talk about shopping and things like that it might take their mind off it, where I think a guy, it would drive virtually crazy... We have found him another job... and he's proving quite good since he's moved'. Examples of the problems that the KeyCo convenor had in women taking on traditional male jobs and vice versa is discussed later and gives some idea of possible opposition to similar proposals at LockCo in the future.

However, there were other splits in the workforce in 1983 that appear to have largely died out by 1996. The pay differentials between skilled and unskilled workers has already been highlighted as an issue of grievance in 1983 whereas it is not in 1996. In a

complementary way, while only one person in 1996 noted that there was a division between the day and piece workers (which largely mirrors skill divisions), more people mentioned this in 1983, specifically with regard to the bad feeling that was cultivated due to the issue of wages. In addition, many commented that there was antagonism between tool setter and tool makers on the shop floor based around class and skill distinctions. As one tool maker observed, '.. a lot tool setters couldn't stand the tool makers and vice versa. There's a lot of division between the tool rooms.. they don't work together'. Again, much of the antagonism stemmed from the pay differentials which existed. While the tool makers complained that the differential was not large enough, the lesser skilled tool setters felt that the differential was too high. As one tool setter commented,

'There's a gap.. between the tool room and with tool setters.. There's a class distinction.. the tool setters .. tend to think that the tool makers.. they're paid too much for what they do. When you look at what skills are involved in our particular job.. I would think that a lot of the chaps on that section would say that they ought to get the same rates'.

In 1983, this even led to a feeling that the tool makers should be organised separately into a different union apart from the rest of the workforce, as one tool making shop steward commented, 'the skill factor involved in tool making, and the tool makers will tell you they don't think they are very well paid. Separate negotiating rights would certainly help our cause'.

Others voiced similar dissatisfaction with the union over differentials, indeed one man stated 'The union fights for the lower man, not the skilled man'. They did have past experience to relate to here, since until 1949, the lock union only represented the hourly paid in the company (Ackers, 1988: 68). Until the introduction of the closed shop in 1974, areas of the factory, in particular the tool room was still represented by other unions such as the

AEU. The discourse of workers in 1996 however suggested that this specific antagonism and division had dissipated.

Summary

Looking at the influence of change over the period at LockCo, the issue of who constitutes 'us' is more complex than just relating to the union across the period. At LockCo, a significant proportion of the group stated that they felt a sense of shared identity with other employees. However, it appeared that any shared identities within LockCo are still very much based around sectional interests and there was not an overriding idea of a collectivity of workers which was directly expressed. Most of these sectional identities were consistent across the period, particularly those relating to departmental work group and gender. However others have faded away, such as identity based around skill group which was prominent in 1983, but which was not apparent in 1996. Once again, there are trends indicating change within the overall continuity of attitudes at LockCo demonstrating the complexity of social identity and the numerous sectional interests existing on the shopfloor. This relates back to the literature in Chapter Two with regard to the nature of union commitment and participation and is discussed further in Chapter Five within the framework of a discussion about the complexity of collective attitudes/action, and the "drama of negotiation". This section will now proceed to investigate the same issues within the comparative study at KeyCo, looking at how differences in union and management policy might impact upon employee perceptions of their social identities on the shopfloor.

Comparison at KeyCo

Similar proportions of people at KeyCo stated that they did not share a sense of identity with others in the workplace. Some felt that they were individuals in the workplace and that the change in culture that had occurred with the introduction of new work methods since the take-over had exacerbated this trend. As one piece worker remarked, '...management has got everybody watching everybody else..' which was added to by another respondent who related incidents of people in a team, 'grassing on each other' to management, if they are seen to be 'skiving off'. Other people commented on the decline of the tradition where workers helped each other out on the shopfloor, '..there tend to be more arguments at work now without the piece work.. if you've got two people who are working together and .. you've got one skiving off and the other doing all the work, there's arguments'. Another commented: 'I like piece work better, because then you worked hard and got more money, now they're all pushing each other, watching all the time who's working hard now everyone's looking, 'Is she talking?' and things like that'. It is interesting to note that piecework, which would be anticipated to be a more individualistic method of working was seen as having cultivated more of a team spirit among assembly lines, and as a workforce, than does the new method of team working in cells.

The ambiguity within the overall discourse however, was illustrated in the seemingly contradictory feelings of work group solidarity that cell working was also found to develop for some workers. Most stated that they did share a sense of identity with others on the shopfloor. As at LockCo, an identity with the work group was most frequently mentioned. This related to a feeling of sociability with those in the work group, and to an idea that the members of a particular work group would often 'stick up' for one another and have a sense of solidarity towards each other. The new system of work organisation

with targets for each cell was thought to have increased this sense of identity with the immediate work group, with cells working together to meet targets. This stood in contrast to the opinions above where the new system was felt to lead to increasing individuality and a decline in feelings of solidarity in some cells. It was apparent that some cells worked together better than others, a point also raised by managers at KeyCo, as the production manager remarked, 'There are some areas that work together very well, they will all help and do whatever bit needs to be done, um, and that's a good team, pulling together as far as I can see, but it's not everywhere'. Moreover, at KeyCo, the discourse suggested that there was a greater feeling of interdepartmental competition than at LockCo (See Pollert, 1996 for a discussion on team working effort). When asked which of the list of statements could apply to the company (See interview agenda in Appendix 1b), while only one person at LockCo stated that a 'Department against Department' feeling existed, nearly a third of the group at KeyCo felt that the statement applied. While this was not stated directly by the workers themselves, one might anticipate that the difference between the two companies results somewhat from the different organisation of work that exists. At KeyCo, as part of the restructuring process, there had been an emphasis placed on departmental targets and departments are publicly compared against one another at team briefing meetings. As the Production Manager related with regard to the monthly targets, '.. they believe that you know.. 'we worked hard, it was them over there that didn't'..... [but] my department is one of the worst, so I told them that and it was quite a shock to them, they hadn't realised that they were letting people down rather than the people they were pointing the finger at'. This is thus one example of the way in which specific differences in management policy can impact upon employee perceptions of commitment and identity within similar workplaces.

Some also alluded to a gender identity whereby the sociability of work was affected by the gender mix of areas. As one woman commented in a similar way to women at

LockCo, '..we don't bother much with the men. But the girls are great... we're all like family on the section' while a man also recognised the division between men and women on the shopfloor, '.. the girls tend to stick together and then there's us..'. An identical vocabulary with LockCo was also apparent with the view that the predominance of women in the factory was felt to lead to an unwillingness to mobilise support behind the union, particularly in terms of industrial action. One man commented that there was a lack of collective feeling throughout the company due to gender, 'It's always been a female dominated industry, and in a lot of cases, it's almost been a second job, I mean they're not going to rock the boat so much'.

The gender segregation of jobs along the same lines as at LockCo is obvious at KeyCo. In fact the embeddedness of such segregation was indicated by the difficulties faced by the Convenor in attempting to persuade men and women to take on jobs formerly seen as a gender preserve as part of the flexibility policy of management. While many of the women had now accepted tool changing jobs and other formerly 'male' jobs, the women themselves were very sceptical that they were able to do it. As the convenor remarked: 'many have surprised themselves cos they were convinced cos they've been put into this slot all these years that they were just assemblers nothing else. I had one women who was convinced that she could never change the machine and the first time they were shown she said 'God, is that all it is? Ain't it easy''. The convenor was very frustrated with the attitudes of some women. She thought that the new system offered women opportunities for extra responsibility in their work and extra pay, and she related examples of outright opposition by some women. She related one example of a woman who had asked her, 'why should women earn that much money? It should only be men'. They are very hard to convince, to see that women can function in a factory as good as a man.'

There were other splits in the workforce at KeyCo that were not part of the discourse of workers at LockCo. For example, there was some suggestion of the existence of a

company identity. Some felt that there were difficulties in terms of 'fitting in' experienced by employees who had joined KeyCo from other lock companies, and the lack of help that they received on the shop floor from existing employees. One man felt that this division between lock companies could explain the difficulty he had faced in getting people to sponsor a rival lock company's football team for a charity event. One might anticipate that this is likely to become more of a problem as the multi-national continues to merge the three lock firms under its ownership. Indeed, the union organisation in each workplace appeared fiercely defensive of their separate status, which had led to the stalemate of discussions at the most recent union AGM and EC meetings where the possibilities of merging the union organisations had been an agenda item ³⁸.

A similar proportion of the group at KeyCo also alluded to a sense of age identity with a split occurring between the older and younger employees that was not apparent at LockCo. This focused around a willingness to change and adapt, in that the younger employees did not feel so threatened by the changes as those employees who had done the same job for decades. As one commented, '.. they've been here that long, they're really stuck in their ways and there's no way they're going to change a job or put themselves out.... Perhaps I'm part of a new breed of people that want to, you've got to be flexible..'. This extended into a feeling that the older employees would not stick up for the younger employees and vice versa. It also meant that younger employees were forced into doing many more activities than the older employees which was a source of resentment for the younger employees who did not feel that they were being treated fairly by the older members of their work groups. Bearing in mind the stagnant situation of work organisation at LockCo, this adaptability to change has not yet become a major issue.

³⁸Meeting with LockCo convenor March 3rd 1998; Annual General Meeting of the NULMW, May 19th 1998

Summary and Comparison

In similarity to LockCo, at KeyCo, the complexity of employee perceptions of 'us' is again highlighted. However, the specific character of the sectional identities existing at KeyCo related very much to the specific context of the workplace. Therefore, while certain sectional identities were similar at both companies, namely those of gender and work group; others such as departmental, company and age were particular to KeyCo. This reflected the specific workplace context, placing a particular emphasis on the influence of specific differences in management policy on employee attitudes and perceptions within similar workplaces as LockCo and KeyCo. For example, the departmental identities identified at KeyCo were enhanced by management policy. This is discussed further in Chapter Five, within a discussion of the importance of studies that place an emphasis on an analysis grounded in the particular workplace context.

Chapter Four: Section Four: 'Them and Us'

This section presents the last part of the account of views from the shopfloor as set out in Chapter One relating to the union-management 'corner' of the triangle of the employment relationship. The main area of interest is with the subjective views and attitudes of the groups of workers with regard to the way in which the union and management interact. Bearing in mind the assumption that the union and management have to meet and engage within the employment relationship, questions involve the nature of this engagement within the workplace (related to 'specific area of inquiry' D). What does the discourse of workers at LockCo reveal about the ways in which they think the union and management should engage and over what issues in the workplace? Who should have control of various aspects of workplace activity? To what extent do workers think the union and management should co-operate with, or resist each other? The expectations of workers with regard to the nature of engagement, are compared with their experience of the way in which the union and management interact in the workplace. The emphasis is on discussing the changes and continuities, which were seen over the period and how these are reflected in workers' vocabulary and rhetoric. These longitudinal findings at LockCo are then compared with the views of workers as part of the comparative study at KeyCo. Finally, a summary of the findings is made.

Views from the shopfloor at LockCo

General view of the union-management relationship

Employees were asked to comment on what they felt the relationship between the union and management was like. Very few were positive about the relationship with people mainly commenting that the 'reasonable relationship' was demonstrated in the low incidence

of strikes over the years. Many saw the relationship in more negative terms and felt it had declined over the past few years. Linked to views discussed in Section Two, there was a feeling that union effectiveness in the workplace had declined due to the deterioration of the working relationship between union and management where management had become more powerful. Negotiation was seen as having become more one-sided, with management being less co-operative than they had been in the 1980s. The increasing power of management was remarked upon by one shop steward in 1996, 'I don't think you get the co-operation with the management as you used to years ago. There used to be a lot of give and take with this company and the union but there isn't anymore'. Another added in similar terms, 'years ago, convenors enjoyed better relations *[management]* are stronger than they've ever been, and they disregard the union more than they used to' (my italics). The implications of these findings are considered further in Chapter Five within the discussion of the impact of the gradual dismantling of paternalistic management style.

To an outsider, the relationship between the union and managers appeared far from amiable. There were regular 'notice-board wars' with letters posted publicly back and forth between the convenor and personnel manager, sometimes involving quite personal attacks and clearly illustrating their inability to talk face to face. There was a general scepticism with regard to managerial integrity from union representatives, demonstrated in more recent union demands that all agreements and proposals be formally written rather than being based on the customary 'gentlemen's agreements'. Shop stewards also commented on the failure of management communications, which were seen as occurring too late in the process of change to afford employees any opportunity to participate. The convenor was very suspicious in particular, of the glossy presentations and promises of

stability that the new multi-national owners were issuing. As a diary entry of the 17th October 1997 reveals,

The aim of the presentation was to give some explanation to the KeyCo payment structure. Once again, the presentation was extremely slick, filled with all the popular industrial jargon but in real content, the package left a lot to be desired. [The multi-national] Directors use a lot of words to say very little'.

These kind of attitudes only seemed to increase the need for the union to act as the official channel of communication in the eyes of the shop steward's committee. In addition, as the concluding Chapter Five will develop further, such findings are significant in that the maintenance of this type of 'structured antagonism', was seen by employees as an important aspect of the success of the union organisation within the "drama of negotiation".

This pessimistic view of the union-management relationship was different to that espoused in 1983. Indeed, all except one person then, felt that relations between the union and management were quite harmonious, whereas only about a quarter of the group in 1996 felt similarly. Views of the good relationship could be seen in comments from the re-interview group in 1983. These included, 'I think they work well together, management and union.... He [the convenor] can come up any time and discuss things, at any level right from the bottom up to the top' while a few even commented that the relationship was too friendly, 'You know I don't know whether I ought to say it but it's probably a little bit too friendly for me.', and 'I think it's too harmonious at the moment, I think it should be more militant. that's it in a nutshell'. Such attitudes were not voiced at all in 1996, although they do strike some chords with the discourse of workers at KeyCo (See Section Two).

Resistance and Co-operation

The feeling that the balance of power had fallen more to management was apparent in 1996 (See Section Two). Management were seen as more ruthless and uncaring in the 1990s than they were in 1983. One example was that there were less explicit espousals of management victimisation in 1983. Indeed there was a significant feeling then that a moderate stance towards management was important and that the union emphasis should be on co-operation with management rather than needing to resist them because they would exploit the workforce. A large minority in 1983 stated that the union should aim to recognise management's 'side'; a view which was not expressed in the same terms in 1996. This attitude was shared by views of the shop steward's role then, for example, 'I think it's, if I can say, liaison with management and workers in one respect, it's just as important for the shop steward to represent to a certain extent the management's point of view as it is the individual worker's point of view'. Another saw them working as a team with management, 'Well [it's] harmony and getting over, if they think it's right, the management's point of view, trying to say what we're trying to do as a team. We do need team work'. This linked to views about whether or not management should be resisted by the union. Whereas a predominant view in the 1990s was that the union should resist management if they acted against worker's interests, in 1983, this was held by only a small minority of the group.

There were however clear indications from the discourse, that workers had a clear idea of the necessity of a co-operative working relationship between union and management which was being threatened by the overall deterioration in relations. This stood alongside the view that the union needed to resist management on occasion. The majority of the group in 1996 saw a good relationship with management as an important characteristic of union power. Only one person saw the relationship with management as unimportant to union power. This worker had an attitude of resigned pessimism about the relationship between unions and management: 'I wouldn't think it matters really, they just seem to treat us with

contempt, all employers treat unions with contempt'. When asked to comment on what they saw as a 'good relationship' with management, half of the group preferred an 'at arm's length' relationship. People commented further that a relationship that was too close would be detrimental. The discourse suggests that this attitude stemmed from views that a relationship that was too close would see issues becoming too personal, 'too close could have a burdening on how negotiations went, put somebody's nose out of joint', and, '.. they might be too close.. they might be in each other's pockets'. Workers thus had specific ideas about the boundaries of the relationship in that while it had to be 'close enough' to allow co-operative negotiations, it should not be 'too close'. Again, this is discussed further within the discussion about employee expectations of the union and management's role as part of the "drama of negotiation".

As an example of how people could choose to move beyond the vocabulary given by the interview questions, many offered alternatives rather than a 'close' or 'at arm's length' relationship. Some felt it was more important that the relationship allowed negotiation, 'My idea of trade unionism is not confrontation. A trade union should be there to represent the interests of the workers and to do the best for them through negotiation, not through out and out power', and, 'I think they should have a good relationship. They should be able to work together. Not fight against each other. I think that's in everybody's interests'. In addition, some stated that rather than a close or at arm's length relationship, the union and management just needed to have a rapport with one another, 'Where you can go in and talk and where they will listen to you, what you have got to say. They have got to be fair' and, 'I think if you've got a good relationship that means that you have got a rapport with people, that you are happy to negotiate with.'. The emphasis throughout was on the need for management and union to be able to talk and co-operate.

Control of activities in the workplace

Another way of uncovering attitudes towards the way in which the union and management interact was to compare expectations of which party should have control over various aspects of activity in the workplace³⁹. In the 1996 interviews, employees were asked to comment on whether various work place activities are, or should be, areas of 'management control', 'union control' or 'joint control' (See interview agenda in Appendix 1a). A desire for an increased union role in the area of pay and redundancies was highlighted by employees. Whilst pay was seen as jointly controlled by management and union, a more predominant view was that pay determination should be a jointly controlled activity. Similarly, while only a small minority felt that redundancies were jointly controlled, almost everyone thought that they should be jointly controlled. This was a significant change from the early 1980s, when the need for an increased union role over redundancies was not voiced, and indeed, many felt that management *should* have control over redundancies.

However, it is interesting to note that there were views that some areas *should* be areas of managerial prerogative. Most employees in 1996 saw management as controlling the organisation of work, and the majority believed that management *should* indeed have this control. Thus the majority of employees did not desire an increased role for the union here, as they commented: 'some union's wouldn't have any idea about controlling the work.' and, 'I think you've got to have management control, I don't think you could have union control in the working process'. Another agreed, 'I think it should be management, at the end of the day, they've got to answer to other people and I think it is their responsibility as to how the work is done'. There is continuity across the period here as this is consistent with the attitudes from 1983, where

³⁹Here I use the term 'control' as a way of identifying the boundaries of managerial and union prerogative, looking at which party has the most influence over the activity (who 'has control'). I am aware of the wider connotations of 'control', particularly as a core concept in Labour Process Theory, however, it is not my intention to deal with these wider issues here.

most felt that management *should* have control over work organisation, and where very few people felt the union should have some kind of input.

However, while we see that at LockCo, the design of work is regarded as a management prerogative, on the issue of the pace of work, the emphasis moves heavily to joint management-union control. On other issues such as recruitment and the introduction of new technology, there was also employee support for joint regulation. On the issue of new technology, many employees complained that they were not able to 'have a say' about what new machines came onto the shopfloor. As one remarked, 'they [management] could take more notice of the people that are expected to use them rather than presenting them as finished'. Relating to the common way in which many people were recruited to the firm through the extended internal labour market (See Chapter One), recruitment was seen as one area where the union could be very useful: 'the union's in a good position to put people in jobs... so really they should have a say as well'. This is consistent with a traditional view of shop steward activity, as is the unanimous view that unions should be involved in redundancies and pay issues. Moreover, it fits in with the well established notions of the compartmentalisation of spheres of activity and influence where employees tend to accept the legitimacy of pre-existing structures of power and authority (Clegg, 1979).

Joint Decision-Making

Linked to the last subsection is a discussion of workers' views of the possibilities for joint decision-making schemes such as works councils and co-operative bodies in the workplace. There was overwhelming support for joint decision making bodies. Comments included, 'I think that could give management another facet to how the shop floor feels', while another added similarly, 'I think its a very good thing. In fact I think we should do so more in this country.' Some people felt that such schemes could work at LockCo but it would need a

careful choice of personnel. Two shop stewards spoke positively about a scheme similar to that of a works council which had existed in the 1980s, 'the works council was representative of everyone in the factory... it stopped about 1986, the managing director decided it wasn't relevant.. I think that was short sighted'.

The positive attitude towards joint decision making was shared by workers in 1983. Any comments made were in favour of such schemes. Indeed, more joint bodies existed then, as one shop steward commented, 'we've got quite a few committees here, joint works committee.. safety committees, welfare committee' all of which had died out by 1996 except for the health and safety committee. In 1983, the tool room steward was a strong advocate of consultation, participation and profit sharing, 'I'm a believer that worker-directors possibly could work, if they had a worker sitting on the board, a worker deciding on the objectives and products they're going to have'. There was disappointment that the joint committees that did exist dealt largely with minor issues as the former convenor said, 'It is a washout... about vending machines, a works committee should be a real discussion', and the gradual demise of even this limited consultation was widely lamented. Five years later, the works committee had become 'dramatically worse', and a woman steward remembered it as an opportunity to speak directly to the managing director, 'the only time some people can get close to the top' (Ackers and Black, 1992: 207).

The support of the workforce and shop stewards for joint decision-making schemes stands in contrast to the opposition from the union convenor and full time officers. They are not supportive of the European works councils as a union body and would not welcome their introduction into the lock companies. Works councils were seen by the union officials I interviewed, as management devices set up to marginalise the union organisation in the workplace. While not a theme of investigation in this thesis, there is

scope for interesting future study, especially if the companies are forced to introduce Works Councils in line with their European LockCo and KeyCo counterparts.

Summary

In terms of the investigation of the influence of contextual change over the period, in 1996/7, there were clear expectations for how the union and management should engage in relations, and disappointment about the deterioration in the relationship between the two parties had deteriorated. This was perceived to be due to management becoming more powerful and less co-operative, and relations becoming increasingly one-sided over the period since 1983. While there was a clear and increased expression of the need for the union to resist management on occasion, the emphasis in the discourse is on the need for co-operation, with workers expressing support for increased joint decision making. This is analysed and explained in Chapter Five, relating to views of the terms of the psychological contract and employee expectations as to the desired role of union and management within the “drama of negotiation”, characterising the employment relationship. The longitudinal comparison is now assessed against the contemporaneous comparison at KeyCo where the influence of specific differences in management and union policy at the two companies is investigated.

Comparison at KeyCo

General view of the union-management relationship

The majority view of the relationship between the union and management at KeyCo was outlined in Section Two, with the general tenor of the comments being that the relationship was too close and too friendly and that the union was seen as 'in management's pocket'. The union is seen as weak, and as allowing management to control the agenda of negotiation. Many shared the vocabulary of a warehouse worker who, when commenting on the way in which the union and management held negotiations, stated that, 'I feel that the union sold us down the river'. This is in comparison to the general feeling at LockCo that the relationship was antagonistic and less co-operative than it had ever been. At neither firm is the relationship seen as satisfactory, but at LockCo this was largely seen as the fault of management, whereas at KeyCo, the union was blamed.

Resistance and Co-operation

It is interesting to note, however, that while the union at KeyCo was criticised for being 'too close' to management, there was an expectation voiced by employees that they felt that a 'good relationship' with management was necessary for union power and effectiveness in the workplace. Most people saw a 'good relationship with management' as an important characteristic of union power. When asked to comment further on what they saw as a 'good relationship', more people felt that the relationship should be close, with only one person stating that the relationship should be 'at arm's length'. Other people offered other alternative types of relationship, with one person stating that the relationship should be one of trust,

'One where you trust them. If someone says something to you, you know they're not lying. I think it's very important to be truthful even if they say 'look I've got to do this, I've got no option', but they're being truthful they don't say to you, 'no we're not going to do it' and you turn around and they've done it. It's better to be truthful even if it's not what you want to hear, at least it's truthful. I think truth is the most important'.

Two people voiced their concern that it was more important that the relationship was on an equal basis and not one sided. It appeared therefore that for a working relationship, workers viewed that a close and co-operative relationship was necessary, but not at the level of closeness which they experienced in the workplace. They recognised that a certain level of 'closeness' was necessary but were not satisfied with the way in which their union representatives currently engaged with management. This flags up a key theme of the later analysis in Chapter Five, where one factor for success within the "drama of negotiation", focused on a recognition of the 'structured antagonisms' which characterised the employment relationship.

Control of activities in the workplace

The discourse with regard to expectations of who (out of the union or management) should have control over various activities in the workplace, compared with their experience, was very similar at the two companies. A similar desire for an increased union role in the area of pay, redundancies and introduction of new technology was highlighted by employees. This again reflects the traditional view of shop steward activity. However, there was greater ambivalence over the issue of controlling the organisation of work. While at LockCo, there was a clear support for the prerogative of management in this area, at KeyCo, the general view was less clear. While most people felt that management did have control of work organisation in the factory, they felt

conversely that the union *should* have a role in this area. As one person remarked, 'it should be joint, so that everybody could pitch ideas in'.. There was therefore more support for an increased union role here than at LockCo. This must be placed in the context where KeyCo has undergone large scale restructuring of the plant, with work organised into cells, compared to LockCo where work had continued in the same way as it had for decades at the time of the interviews. While the majority of people felt that the increased flexibility had made their jobs more interesting, some of the longest serving employees highlighted how different the new methods of working were to their traditional working culture. As one female packer commented,

'[before] we did move around a bit but only if there wasn't any work, they'd say 'Do you mind doing that' and I wouldn't mind, you know, it was a bit of a change and you used to enjoy it. But you knew when you came back the next morning, you'd be back in your old job. I mean it used to be 'that's my bench, that's my tool', now you're not allowed to say that, it's not your bench, it's anybody who's sitting there's bench. Now you know, I don't know, you spend such a good many hours there, you feel as if it's part of your life, you know, and you like to have your familiar surroundings like you do at home, whereas if you're moved here, there and everywhere, it unsettles you.'

The area of work organisation was thus one where people would have liked more union and employee input, precisely because this was one area of large-scale change in the company.

Joint Decision-Making

Linked to the last subsection, are workers' views of the possibilities for joint decision-making schemes in the workplace. All but one of those who commented here, agreed with the idea of joint decision making schemes and felt that they would be a good idea, enabling them to get their views across to management, 'If people were to talk together and co-

operate a bit more, it could move things on. It would make things better' and, 'I think that's a good idea. I mean when the union and management meet, you only get half of what's gone on, you know, you don't get the full story.' There was some optimism that they could work at KeyCo, if people gave them a chance, with people speaking of a similar mechanism already in place in the company: 'There is, there maybe something like it in existence already in the company, there are certain meetings, production meetings, but I don't seem to know what goes on. They have meetings to say like how the company's faring, but it Ain't like joint decisions.'

There was similar opposition as there was at LockCo, to such schemes from the union point of view. The convenor explained that such a decision making body would have to be primarily union led if it was to work successfully, 'I think they're great ideas. Em I think the problem with work councils is you need trained people to look at all and not just one side of the argument. Work councils tend to come up with what the management want rather than ... you'll get people agreeing cos it might be what an individual wants rather than the committee, and shop floor and they tend to swap about a lot. You need people trained in ... to go on to ... I don't think work councils actually work'. This was added to in a similar way by the concerns of another employee, who while agreeing with the schemes in principle, did think that they would be open to management domination, 'I should imagine very selective for people actually on there. I mean it's all very well all sitting round a table and discussing but what is it they're discussing, highly selective I should imagine.... management's best bet I would think'.

Summary and Comparison

The longitudinal comparison at LockCo highlights the way in which employee expectations of the terms of engagement between the union and management are influenced by their past experiences of a more paternalistic management style and the impact of its gradual dismantling. This is a key theme of the analysis in Chapter Five. The cross-company comparison indicates some similarities. At KeyCo, there was a

similar recognition to LockCo of the need for the union and management to co-operate and there was a similar level for support for joint decision making schemes. However, at both firms, the experience of the relationship was different with respect to workers' expectations of how the union and management should engage in the employment relationship. This highlights the utility of the comparison between the two firms in identifying how different managerial and union strategies affected perceptions of the relationship between the union and management, and consequently, perceptions of commitment and trust. At both firms, the relationship was seen as having deteriorated, and workers were generally less satisfied now than in the 1980s. However, the dissatisfaction revolved around different issues. At KeyCo, the relationship was seen as 'too close', with the union seen as having taken on the world-view of management, and there was a desire for the union to regain some negotiating power in the relationship. At LockCo, the balance of power within the relationship could also be seen as one sided in favour of management, however, this was due not to the union becoming 'incorporated', but due to management ruthlessness and their action in preventing the union from having an active role. Again, to flag up the later analysis in Chapter Five, these findings highlight the complexity of the 'structured antagonisms', which characterise the employment relationship and what the differing perceptions of the way in which the union and management interact or engage, say, about the 'drama of negotiation' at the two lock companies.

Chapter Five: Discussion and Implications

This chapter attempts to make sense of the findings presented in Chapter Four. This is a two-fold process. Firstly, the objective is that the findings will help to uncover the dynamics of the employment relationship at the LockCo over time, leading to greater understanding of the changes and continuities in views and attitudes and hence their implications. Secondly, on the utility of the comparison between KeyCo and LockCo, looking at what was indicated about the influence of specific differences in organisation and strategy on employee perceptions and attitudes. Overall, the analysis is based around the 'specific areas of inquiry' outlined in Chapter Two. The intention is that the findings and their analysis, will make a contribution to existing research, theory and literature; complementing and supporting, or seeking to challenge positions and wider findings.

The chapter is split into four sections. The first presents the significant implications for methodology, reflecting on the potential richness of and importance of workplace level study, and the way that the findings demonstrated the need to focus on the 'subject' in industrial relations studies (Knights and Willmott, 1985; Beynon, 1975). Within this methodological discussion, there is also consideration of the utility of the 'dual commitment' concept as a tool for the study of the employment relationship. From this emerges the idea that the underlying notion of 'dual commitment' (as it has most commonly been presented and utilised in existing literature), is potentially far more problematic, drawing on the evidence of employee perceptions of the 'structured antagonisms' which characterise the employment relationship. This discussion is extended later within the framework of the 'drama of negotiation'.

The chapter then moves on to discuss the implications of the research for the workforce, outlining the complex nature of the 'them and us' situation, the nature of collective attachments and the propensity for collective action in the workplace. Next, the implications for management are presented, looking in greater analytical detail at the concept of paternalism (and its gradual dismantling), as an appropriate basis for analysing the changes taking place at LockCo, and for explaining some of the differing attitudes which emerged at KeyCo, within a historical context of paternalism. Finally a more detailed discussion of the implications for the union in terms of policy, structure, strategies and leadership style is presented. This warrants an extended presentation as this area is seen as a significant finding of the research and provides much scope for contribution to theory and knowledge. The thesis demonstrates how the employment relationship is most usefully seen as a 'drama of negotiation', enriching some of the discussion concerning the notion of the character of union leadership and its interaction with managerial processes⁴⁰.

⁴⁰ Informed by personal communication from Mike Terry, February, 1999.

Implications for Method

Dual commitment as a frame of reference

In Chapter Two, the 'dual commitment' concept was presented as a useful way to frame the various strands of the research; for analysing and attempting to understand the changing perceptions of the employment relationship. It has provided a useful way of framing the questions, highlighting the identity affiliations and organising the findings around the socio-psychological views from the shopfloor, vis a vis the three 'corners' of the employment relationship. The debates around 'dual commitment' and the need for a socio-psychological approach, channelled the thesis towards a method that was essentially based on the subjective views of the shopfloor (then surrounded with the contextual information to provide thick description). This approach has been able to uncover rich findings, which while primarily focusing on 'views from below', is able to offer conclusions which relate to a wider view of employment relationships within the workplaces studied.

The findings from this research make a contribution to the body of literature surrounding 'dual commitment'. It provides another viewpoint on the much-debated existence of 'dual commitment' and the nature of the separate, but interconnected, commitment and identities to company and union. This focuses on the 'specific areas of inquiry', set out in Chapter Two, where particular aspects of the debate around 'dual commitment' were prioritised within this thesis. These involved; primarily, what the findings indicated about the nature of perceptions of commitment, identity and trust over time, and in response to changed managerial and union strategies and structures (see 'specific areas of inquiry' C and D). As the following sections will indicate, the perceptions, attitudes and

expectations of workers (relating to a discussion of psychological contracts), highlight the complexity of commitment and trust and the lack of evidence for a static existence of commitment to any social group. What links the following analysis together is a view of shifting perceptions about the employment relationship and the 'structured antagonisms' which categorise it.

A general overview of the lock workers' orientations towards management does not paint a very positive picture of the level of commitment to the company at either firm. There was a pervasive negativity towards management's behaviour throughout the interviews at both firms, which seemed to largely revolve around feelings of social distance which separate employees and managers in the workplace. The longitudinal evidence at LockCo suggested that the orientation of workers towards managers had become more negative, with increasing disappointment voiced with respect to the lack of contact with managers on the shopfloor. Managers were seen as aloof and distant, more vindictive and exploitative and as having less concern for the welfare of the workforce. The workforce did not trust management to either treat them fairly; or to make the company successful. (This is further extended later in this chapter, within the discussion of the implications of the dismantling of paternalistic style). Add to this, the lack of professed feelings of team identity, and the evidence suggests that there was a very low level of commitment to and identity with, the company. Cross comparison with the views of workers at KeyCo found similar orientations to management, where a process of restructuring (within a context of past experience of paternalism) had led to increased negativity towards management.

With regard to how these relationships have evolved with, responded to and mediated against, the wider environmental context (related to 'specific area of inquiry' B), any managerial rhetoric of increased communication and a desire to break down the

traditional 'them and us' situation does not appear to reflect the lock workers' lived experience. While care must be taken when comparing quantitative macro surveys with that of the qualitative findings of this research, there is some support for such findings in more general national evidence (WIRS, 1992; WERS, 1998; Bacon, 1995). This has indicated that there has been a decline in the quality of the relationship between employees and management, a deterioration in the level of contact and a decrease in employee identification with their companies, and an overall perception among this group of British workers that the interests of workers and managers remain opposed (See Chapter Two). Perhaps more significantly, a qualitative approach has pointed to the prevalence of this feeling, with the vocabulary of 'them and us' being extremely pervasive in the discourse of workers at both LockCo and KeyCo. The underlying reasons behind their views, are analysed within the discussion in the next three sections of this chapter.

The 'trade off' thesis of the 'dual commitment' debate (Chapter Two) suggests that the lack of identity with the company and overall disappointment and dissatisfaction with management might lead to increased commitment to the union. Analysis of this can be looked at as a side issue of a discussion of the changing perceptions of commitment and trust, in response to trends and shifts in both the external and internal contexts of the lock firms (links to 'specific areas of inquiry' B and C). At LockCo, it certainly appears to be the case that there was increased commitment and identification with the workplace union over the period. This does relate to the lack of commitment and identity with management, indeed the union was seen as more salient in a context where members felt less able to personally communicate with management and where their situation within the employment relationship was felt to be more vulnerable and powerless than it was in

the early 1980s. The union was seen as more communicative, accessible, representative and accountable than it was in the early 1980s. While its effectiveness in the workplace had declined in many ways, this was seen to be a reflection of the wider economic and market position and not the fault of the union. Indeed the union was felt to have done a 'good job' in the areas of pay settlements, protecting jobs and conditions, bearing in mind the difficult context. The findings indicated that there had not been a withdrawal of support for the workplace union. Again, a comparison with survey evidence can be made which tends to highlight the continued resilience of support for trade unions (See Chapter Two).

However, at KeyCo, an entirely different picture emerged, which challenges the simple 'trade-off' thesis. Here, the low level of company identity was not matched by an increased union identity but quite the contrary, where the general orientation towards the union was just, if not more, negative than views towards management. The workplace union organisation at KeyCo was viewed consistently more unfavourably than at LockCo. This was unexpected, as one might anticipate similar views bearing in mind the community-based nature of the national union, and the historical and sociological similarities between the firms. On a superficial level then, it appears that there was a low level of company commitment and identity at both firms, while there was a striking difference with regard to union commitment and identity, where it was high at LockCo, but very low at KeyCo. At neither company was there evidence of 'dual commitment' to both company and union. (This supports the findings of other 'dual commitment' research in a British context, qualifying the findings of mainstream 'dual commitment' research based in North America (Chapter Two)).

However, there is a more significant analytical point to be drawn out here. The findings from this thesis also point to the way that the 'trade-off' thesis of 'dual commitment' simplifies the nature of perceptions of the employment relationship. It is here that a more significant contribution is made to the state of thinking on 'dual commitment'. At LockCo, the convenor had a close working relationship with management and there are indications that workers were not afraid of the union having an active role with management. Indeed there was evidence of an underlying loyalty to the firm. However, commitment from the membership for the union was also maintained. In other words, there can be a carry over of commitment and identity to both parties; what is important is the way in which the 'drama' of the employment relationship is managed. It is this 'management of ambiguity' that can account for some of the differences in attitude between KeyCo and LockCo. This issue of the 'drama' of the employment relationship and its dynamics, is discussed in greater detail later in this chapter, but it is important to add a preliminary presentation of the issue here, to highlight how this thesis has questioned the debate about the claimed 'trade-off' of commitment within the 'dual commitment' literature and pointed to the fact that the concept is potentially more problematic. In using a concept that is borrowed from a psychological field, there has been the possible danger of confusing means with ends; assessing the nature of 'dual commitment' in the lock companies as a stand-alone concept rather than using it as a means to understanding the dynamics of relations. However, as was established in Chapter Two, this was not the way that the concept of 'dual commitment' was used in this thesis. What is more interesting is what the case studies suggest about the nature of the dynamics of this commitment; the dynamics of the relationships between the three 'corners' of the employment relationship as this chapter will go on to discuss. Finally,

with regard to methodology, the importance of contextual factors is clearly highlighted by the discursive evidence and is discussed in the next section.

The importance of context

The qualitative nature of this research allowed a deeper understanding of the issues which frame the world-views of those interviewed. What were the experiences and contexts that framed these views? The orientation of the workers must be seen as grounded in the particular conditions of the specific workplace. At both LockCo and KeyCo, the majority of employees had been employed at the company for more than ten years (See Chapter Two). They have a long history of experience in the company from which to draw their views and opinions. Opinions and views of management were set within an historical framework of traditional family paternalism. Their past experience saw a more personal and friendly employment relationship, where there was significant contact between managers and employees on the shopfloor, where managers worked their way up through the company from apprentice level, where there were joint decision-making and consultative committees, and where there was a large degree of company welfare involvement, both within the factory walls and in the wider LockTown community. It was on the basis of these expectations that management were felt to fall short.

The orientation of views towards the union was also placed within this frame of reference that reflects on their historical experience. For all of the reasons that the company and managers were condemned by workers, the union was praised. In some respects, the union had taken on some of the paternalistic involvement, which the companies had allowed to decline (see Chapter Four: Section Two). A similar situation existed with regard to communication, contact and accessibility. The management were

criticised for not making an effort to be more accessible and having more contact with the shopfloor. This was seen as a strength of the union at LockCo. In a context where the union had moved from a closed shop situation to one where the members must sign up for the union voluntarily, the voluntary lock union could be seen as encouraging more responsible trade unionism than when membership was compulsory (see the debate in Hanson et al, 1982).

This focus on the past expectations of the union and company relates to 'specific area of inquiry' D (See Chapter Two), looking at the role of context and experiences, (both past, and present assessed in reference to the past), in informing workers' perceptions. This also reflects the older debate within industrial sociology (Bulmer, 1975) about the influence of context on self-consciousness, (as discussed in Chapter Two). Most of the critiques of Lockwoods' (1966) typology of the working class focused on the need to recognise the heterogeneity of groups of workers. The predominant view in many of the empirical studies directly compared with the typology (Bulmer, 1975), emphasised the multiplicity of images and meanings systems that existed. More importantly, the influence of the historical context of a workplace was highlighted (Martin and Fryer, 1975; Fox, 1985: xii), where people's orientation and perceptions of the employment relationship were shaped by their past experiences and were related to an exchange relationship that rested on a framework of expectations of the terms of these relations. As Martin and Fryer found with their study of workers at Casterton Mill, these perceptions *'are not only a product of present milieux, but of present milieux interpreted in the light of past experience and expectations for the future'* (1975: 113). This viewpoint is consistent with an assessment of the impact of external changes on perceptions, expectations and attitudes. This may explain some of the overall continuity

and resilience in attitude found over time at LockCo. The specifics of this resilience are analysed later in this chapter but it is useful to show how the overall analysis is entwined and threaded throughout.

The need for workplace level studies

This thesis has therefore highlighted the benefits of workplace level studies that focus on building up a detailed picture of surrounding contextual factors. It has focused on the influence of the specific local workplace context, on workers' perceptions of their work lives and their attachments to social groups. Meeting Hartley's call (See Chapter Two) for more qualitative studies of 'dual commitment', this research highlights the diversity of views and attitudes across very similar workplaces in very similar contexts, and lends supports to doubts about relying solely on findings drawn from large scale surveys at national level. The specific differences in organisation, structure and policies within different workplaces can be important influences on perceptions and attitudes across similar contexts. To get an in-depth picture of the nature of commitment and identities surrounding the employment relationship, qualitative case studies at workplace level are extremely valuable. When dealing with complex socio-psychological attachments and relationships, it is not enough to rely on a short survey answer. As outlined in the following sections of this chapter, a qualitative approach (and particularly one within the 'methodologically pluralistic' framework such as was used here), has the ability to uncover the contradictions, inconsistencies and ambivalent consciousness which characterise peoples' views, attitudes and opinions. It also stresses the need to build up a detailed contextual picture to surround the discursive evidence.

Implications for the Workforce

The complexities of 'them and us'

This research allowed an 'unpacking' of the phrase 'them and us'; to investigate more fully exactly who made up 'us' on the shopfloor. Literature is full of generalised comments about 'workers' or 'employees', such that the 'British worker' has become more instrumental and more individualistic; or that the 'oppressed line worker' with their monotonous job, needs to be empowered and desires an enriched job. Lockwood's (1966) typology of the working class was criticised, for failing to recognise the heterogeneity of the workforce. Similarly, Guest et al (1993) pointed out that the two-fold commitment to either union or company may only be an industrial caricature, with 'them and us' attitudes being varied and wide ranging. The workers at the lock companies were not a homogenous group, even though they shared very similar backgrounds, working environment, and have been brought up with the historical and sociological traditions of the industry. While they could act collectively on occasion and did recognise the existence of a 'them and us' attitude between managers and workers; they identified more closely with particular groups on the shopfloor. The workers I talked to were tool makers or tool setters, assemblers and packers; they were men and women; the 'old guard' or the generation of younger employees; they were LockCo or KeyCo people; and there were other individual attachments that were too numerous to mention. It is important to recognise such differences and sectional interests when one talks about 'the workers' so as to grasp a firmer idea of the heterogeneous character of the workplace.

The nature of collectivist attitudes

Linked to 'specific area of inquiry B' and an assessment of the impact of changes in the wider context, there was a continuity in the focus of the lock employees at both firms upon the traditional concerns associated with union membership. Waddington and Whitson's study led them to claim that "*There are few signs of the individualism that is supposed to have accompanied the Thatcherite war on trade unions*" (1992: 23). The account at LockCo is partly consistent with this interpretation, as there was no obvious decline in the level of collectivist feeling that already existed over the period. Moreover, there was a continued focus on traditional reasons for membership and support (at both companies) for rights of unionism, such as to take industrial action and have a wider social and political role (at least at LockCo). However, there were few indications of traditional class-based collectivism. Despite an increased feeling of 'them and us', there was a lack of collective identity and solidarity, with the majority of employees at both firms seeing people as 'individuals working for themselves'. The 'them and us' feeling did not seem to inspire an overarching feeling of collective identity. Workers did not occupy their 'side' of the divide collectively but as a group of individual interests. As outlined above, there were numerous groups within the factories that people identified with. With regard to the longitudinal comparison at LockCo, within this, there was overall consistency in attitudes over the period which counters claims that there has been an 'onslaught of individualism'. There were very few avowals of collective feeling in 1996, and worker's concerns in being union members were largely instrumental, looking for economic betterment through the traditional concerns of pay and conditions with the union acting as a force against the power of management. This was very similar to the attitudes and orientations found in 1983, and suggests that union membership over the period was never any more class conscious or collective-spirited. The ideal of the class-

conscious collective worker is perhaps a myth, at least in this context. However, there are caveats.

The issue appears to be far more complex than just establishing whether or not people directly voice a collectivist attitude. Increased commitment to and espoused identity with the union did not necessarily lead to an increase in direct avowals of solidaristic feeling. Bulmer (1975; 6) noted the problematic relationship between social imagery and class-consciousness. The existence of certain images such as a 'them and us' feeling, or a belief in the conflict between managers and employees, might be regarded as underlying class action at a theoretical level, but there is no automatic connection between these images and consequences of these views for strike action or collective solidarity. There is also evidence that people draw from the available 'vocabularies of motive' (Wright-Mills, 1947). People in the 1990s at LockCo (matching contemporary evidence at KeyCo) were more in support of the right to strike than in 1983, which may be evidence of an underlying solidaristic attitude. However, they were also very cautious about industrial action and wanted limited use to be made of strikes. Most did not want to increase the antagonism between employees and managers that already existed. On the other hand, they perceived the necessity of having the strike weapon 'in the wings', seeing industrial action as an option of last resort. Similarly, while the workplace union did not have a history of militancy, and a defining feature of the union was its collaborative stance towards management in the past, industrial action was still seen as a 'ultimate weapon'. Examples of united resistance by the shopfloor were discussed in Chapter Four, Section Two. People therefore differentiated between the existence of a feeling of solidarity or group ethos existing all the time, and the ability to act collectively over certain issues. Workers in 1996 were aware that they could act collectively on

occasion, over certain issues, as illustrated in comments like, 'The employers are aware that employees are motivated, they can show that solidarity', and, 'over important issues we are together and that's all that counts'. This sentiment seems to be mirrored by that of the General Secretary of the union, 'As a collective body, we haven't got the strength collectively but.. I think we do have that collectivist sentiment, over the right issues.. support will be there'. The findings give support to the thesis of surges of membership participation which union leaders can build upon (Fosh, 1993: Chapter Two). It is useful to reflect back on the debate that individualism should not necessarily be opposed to collectivism, drawing on Fox's (1985) distinction between 'organic' and 'instrumental' collectivism. What this highlights with particular relevance to this thesis, is the complexity of the concept of collectivism and the difficulty in determining the level and kind of collective consciousness that anybody holds. At LockCo, there were examples of united action that served a wider collective purpose not directly for their individual interests, while at other times, the collective support is purely based around individual interests or a small group of individuals' interests. Moreover, it is extremely difficult to uncover the cognitive processes of an individual. Thus collective action that does not appear to meet the interests of the individual concerned directly, may serve a purpose in pre-empting future threats to individual interests. People may refuse to work overtime in protest against redundancies because it may be their own job that is threatened in the future.

In addition, the importance of close and personal contact is stressed in the findings from the lock companies. Employees wanted closer contact with the people who make decisions about their working lives, whether this be union or management. In particular, the importance of union leadership, in building upon the surges of solidaristic feeling is emphasised; something that is dealt with in much more detail in the last section of this

chapter. Avowals of collectivism or support for collective action do not stand alone, they are entwined and embedded in a context of relationships between union leaders and members and of expectations and experience of union action and inaction. Delete section about example of resilience of union organisation. This relates back to the discussion in the last section emphasising the importance of understanding the contextual grounding, which informs perceptions and attitudes. It also suggests the problematic nature of these perceptions, leading to the analysis within the next section of this chapter. Moved a large section to the next section's analysis.

Implications for Management

The nature of commitment and ambivalent consciousness

The evidence allowed an insight into the ambivalence and contradictions, as well as the consistencies within views and opinions. This suggested an ambivalent consciousness, with the negativity towards the companies standing alongside a more complex discourse of aspirations of co-operation (Ackers and Black, 1992). There was a more pluralist appreciation of what management's role is and what it should be. Alongside the negativity, coexisted positive expectations of effective and dynamic management, which could ensure the growth and prosperity of the companies. This was not to deny the general principle that the union and management should occupy separate positions, indeed much of the discourse suggested that there was an accepted inevitability of the 'them and us' view of the employment relationship. This reflects a traditional view of the 'master-servant' nature of a paternalistic employment relationship. However, at both firms, people did not want the relationship to be necessarily antagonistic and would welcome a return to the more friendly and personal nature of the relationship that they perceived to have existed in the past. Relating back to the previous discussion, emphasising the influence of context on attitudes and perceptions, in line with LockCo and KeyCo, the respect, or lack of, shown for the Casterton family in Martin and Fryer's (1975) study, was also based upon the management's fulfilment, or not, of their traditional paternalist role expected by workers.

What is once again highlighted is the complex, fragmentary and ambivalent nature of images, perceptions and their meanings. Relating back to Lockwood's (1966) typology of the working class (See chapter Two), when a selection of empirical studies was

compared with the typology (Bulmer, 1975), some support was found for the view that specific attitudes correlate with and form distinctive patterns based around worker types. However, the social imagery was more complex than the typology suggested. It is this conclusion within this literature which is most pertinent to an understanding of the findings in this thesis. Martin and Fryer's investigation of the 'deferential' worker type emphasised the shifting frames of reference that existed. They found that:

"belief in the value of loyalty, in the legitimacy of managerial authority.. can coexist with a consciousness of sharp conflict between the interests of management and workers... two vocabularies coexisted alongside each other. The first based upon long experience of a paternalist management was expressed in deferential terms; the second based upon recent experience of economic change and rationalisation, expressed in proletarian terms"(1975: 109).

At LockCo in particular, a very similar situation existed, where, as was discussed above, there was a strong belief in the essential conflict of interests between managers and employees, coupled with support for resistance and industrial action, alongside views of managerial legitimacy and company loyalty. Martin and Fryer's comment perhaps encapsulates the perception of 'structured antagonisms' within the employment relationship emerging from the lock workers discourse. This provides a more sophisticated view of perceptions of commitment and trust than does that of 'dual commitment'. Hence, what is reiterated again as an important influence on the exact makeup of any shared frame of reference is the specific workplace context, with its own past and present experiences. Thus, at both KeyCo and LockCo, as has been emphasised before, perceptions and understanding of the dynamics of employment relations were firmly grounded in the specific context. As Blackburn and Mann similarly concluded:

“If the workers in our sample are ‘confused’ then they have every right to be, for that is an accurate reflection of the reality that confronts them, instead of viewing [images of society] as approximations to consistent and coherent images, we should regard them as attempts to grapple with the real contradictions of the worker’s situation” (1975: 156).

This ‘confusion’ was clearly suggested in this research, however there were also elements of shared world-views and consistency, especially across the time frame.

People at the lock firms did not believe that the roles of the respective parties in the employment relationship should necessarily be changed. Indeed, there was a clear suggestion that the traditional prerogative of management in terms of the control of work organisation should be maintained (Chapter Four, Section Four). There was little desire for a change in the traditional roles occupied by the management and trade union functions. There is consistency here with the view from other empirical studies, suggesting that even in the early 1980s, *‘few unions in practice expressed or pursued policies and objectives that conflicted with ‘management’s right to manage’* (Terry, 1983; 168). This also reflects the mixture of conflict and co-operation that this thesis reveals as characterising the employment relationship. Consent, compliance, resistance and conflict are mutually embedded. Collinson (1994: 51) found similar elements of ambiguity among the ‘Slavs’ workers where even the most critical and radical of workers in the engineering factory, supported managerial prerogative. [Again, the problematic nature of an underlying notion of “dual commitment” is once again acknowledged, where in fact there are multiple, conflictual and coexisting discourses and perceptions which may shift over time and in reference to experiences.

Thus, the prerogative of management over work organisation at LockCo had continued much as it did in the early 1980s. However, there was a feeling now, that the balance of

power in the employment relationship had moved even further towards management, with managers taking arbitrary decisions over other traditionally jointly controlled activities in the workplace such as redundancies, the introduction of new technology and machinery and the pace of work. In addition, managers were not seen as meeting the expectations that go along with that traditional, paternalistic managerial prerogative, which included a concern for the welfare of the workforce and a wider community-based social responsibility. It was here that management lost out in the relationship. Whether or not the lock workers historically matched the model of the 'deferential worker' (Lockwood, 1966), is something difficult to assess without the comparable evidence from the founding days of the companies in the nineteenth century. However, one might anticipate the positive effects of management and employers meeting the expectations of employees today- as Martin and Fryer stated, '*Deference is fostered by behaviour regarded as appropriate*' (1975: 112). At LockCo and KeyCo, this involved personal and particularistic contact, a concern for employee welfare and a wider social responsibility. Employees desired more co-operation with management and would welcome more communication and participation in the decisions made about their work lives. These attitudes, coupled with the evidence of loyalty to the employer and willingness to go 'out of my way' in order to make the company a success, suggested a potential; as yet, untapped. Despite the overall deterioration of the relationship between managers and workers, there still remained some underlying loyalty to the company, which could be taken advantage of.

This was particularly noticeable in the way that the paternalistic involvement of the company is lamented. Workers felt that the deterioration of relations between managers and employees had led to the demise of feelings of loyalty to and pride in the company.

There was a suggestion that this has consequences in terms of work effort. As described earlier, one packer at KeyCo related an incident that occurred soon after she had started at the company in the 1960s when people had stayed behind hours after work in order to meet an order that they were behind schedule for. Her view was that the reputation of the company was at stake and the promise to the customer had to be met, and therefore they felt obliged to work overtime. The discourse suggests that such an incident was less likely to occur in the 1990s. The view of the shopfloor saw there to be more 'give and take' in the early days, whereas now any requests for overtime work were seen in the light of redundancies, arbitrary changes to work organisation and the one sided relationship between managers and employees. At LockCo, for example, women on the 2295 line refused to work overtime because of the level of redundancies: feeling that they should not be working over, if others were out of jobs (See Chapter Four, Section Two).

Thus, this thesis serves to underline the complexities of people's perceptions and images of relations in the workplace. This is in line with a criticism made by Collinson, (who while talking specifically in his work about studies of resistance, makes a point that is relevant to a wider study of the employment relationship), that *'few studies in the literature.. adequately account for these shifting ambiguities, ambivalences, confusions, partial knowledge, inconsistencies, multiple motives and paradoxical effects that comprise the subjective reality of organisational power relations'* (1995: 52). [Thus the findings of this thesis fit in with a view of the dramaturgical process, where the transient and changing nature of the 'parts' played by people is emphasised (Gardner and Avolio, 1998). Perceptions of appropriate union leader, management and employee roles are not static. Dramaturgists see these roles as fluid and dynamic, with individuals continuously

moving back and forth between them (Goffman, 1959, Schlenker, 1980). This matches similar problems widely noted in sociological studies of working class images of society where *'an important feature of images is that they may be fragmentary, ambiguous or uncertain'* (Bulmer, 1975; 5). Perhaps what is most striking therefore, in the case of the lock companies is that within this confusion and ambiguity, there was still evidence of some consensus and shared viewpoints.

Paternalism: Reinvigoration or Anachronism?

This research has not been concerned with debating the relative merits of paternalism as a management style; indeed that would amount to a research thesis on its own, and has been a major theme of the larger project of work in the lock industry. However, it is relevant insofar as the lock companies have a history of paternalistic employers and because certain features of this paternalistic system of the past have been identified in employee expectations and perceptions of the present employment relationship. While there has been a debate about the similarities between traditional paternalism and HRM policies (Ackers and Black, 1991), paternalism is seen commonly as somewhat of an anachronism; *"the term.. either beckons us towards the 'Lost World' of employment relations, or leaves a more uneasy impression of time out of joint"* (Ackers, 1998: 2). However, the findings of this research highlight that the general concept of paternalism may retain some utility for managers in particular contexts. In particular, the longitudinal study within LockCo revealed interesting points about the negative impact on employee attitudes towards management, when a traditional paternalist approach to management was gradually dismantled. This is also relevant to KeyCo, where a similar paternalistic tradition continues to inform their perceptions.

It is important not to romanticise the concept of paternalism and see it as a panacea; it is after all a *"system of control"* (Fox, 1985; 3) and there are numerous examples of the detrimental effects of paternalistic control, especially on the workforce (Drummond, 1995; Rae, 1969). However as Fox claimed,

"Under certain conditions, paternalism has proved so valuable a system of control as often to be thought worth a certain amount of nurture and, in any case, paternalistic

care may bring some additional benefit to the superior as well as obedience, thereby enabling him to derive the best of both worlds" (1985; 4).

Moreover, the lock employees were very supportive of certain aspects of paternalistic management. In the Section Four of this chapter, relating to the implications of the research for the union, there is a discussion of the "drama of negotiation". In a similar way, Ackers notes that there is also a 'theatre of paternalism' (1998: 8), with expected behaviour patterns. This is not to say that management could 'fake' this element of paternalism. This management style is about an underlying relationship of reciprocal duties and responsibilities. It is in these terms that management at the lock companies are seen to fall short. If the union-management relationship is seen as a drama which must be negotiated in a certain way to retain support (see later section), so too, managers were criticised for not fulfilling their expected role in the drama of the workplace at the lock companies. Paternalism (as any other management 'style') must be seen as a human relationship, not just an economic contract. At the lock companies, the management had lost sight of the 'drama of the employment relationship', whereas there was more evidence that the union (at least at LockCo) has not.

Ackers (1998: 10) argues that paternalism should not be seen as bounded by time but by social structure, although I would contend that the temporal context is very important. The particular social structure of a workplace and its own time-bounded context is important to an assessment of paternalism as a viable management style. Particularly at KeyCo, (while outlining managerial views is not part of this thesis), there was evidence in the discourse of managers that they desired increased employee commitment to the firm, so that a team ethos was created and the 'them and us' feeling reduced. Part of successfully achieving these aims must involve the fulfilment of employee expectations

about the nature of the employment relationship. In this particular context, this included a desire for some paternalistic elements. While there can be no guarantee that meeting expectations of more contact, welfare concern and community responsibility, would lead to increased employee commitment, support, loyalty and productivity, there was evidence that they did respond positively to reciprocity. Workers on the shopfloor talked in a vocabulary in which reciprocal relations were seen as positive. For example, workers made comments like: 'Loyalty and respect have to be earned. It's a mutual thing like in relationships with anyone', and, 'If you treat them fairly, they should treat you the same'. This was also demonstrated in the praise that people gave for other firms, which appeared to offer more paternalistic care. One paint shop worker whose wife worked at Marks and Spencer commented, 'I weigh up what they're getting in M and S and compared to here.. they do a lot for the workers.. they get a far better crack at the whip. The management there do look after them and treat them all right'. While he recognised that this meant there was no place for a trade union, this was rationalised in terms that reflected the increased salience of a union in a context which was seen as increasingly threatening to the lock companies, in terms of economic survival and in terms of workers' rights. For instance, a union was not seen to be as necessary at a company like Marks and Spencer compared to LockCo: 'Oh they won't entertain unions, but the way things are there, they don't really need one because they've got things for liaising'. It would be difficult for management at the lock companies to suddenly begin acting like the old family owners. Indeed building on their past experiences of the managers through the 1980s, any attempts by managers to re-invigorate isolated elements of paternalistic style, had largely been seen by the shopfloor as 'empty promises', or involving a 'sting in the tail', or had not been felt to have led to any change in relations within the workplace. One warehouse worker at KeyCo was bitterly disappointed that mixing socially with managers when he was with a group of friends in the local pub, and

spending the time chatting and buying each other drinks, did not change the antagonistic and distanced relationship with them back on the shopfloor. Similarly, an attempt by the Operations Director to go down on the shopfloor and wish people a 'Merry Christmas' was seen as insincere because of the context in which it occurred, where management had also decided to abolish their traditional 'Christmas Boxes'.

The lock worker's expectations of the role that managers should have, were quite clear. While they want the benefits of paternalistic care, they also did little to challenge the traditional managerial prerogative to manage. Thus, they maintained many perceptions of the employment relationship which were quite characteristic of the 'traditional' and 'deferential' worker, fitting in with a more paternalistic style of management. While paternalism may be seen as an "*archaic hangover from the past*" (Ackers, 1998: 12) in certain situations, in this particular context, where there are industrial, occupational and community characteristics that are themselves the product of past regimes, there may be more fertile soil for returning to elements of an older style of management. There is a extensive literature which makes comparisons between Japanese working practices and paternalism, where one can see the reconstruction of apparently archaic social relations within a modern economy (Hunter, 1995; also see Ackers and Black, 1992). This is not the crux of the debate however. Management do not necessarily need to return to an older style in its entirety, the issue is that management do have other options. They can recognise that certain elements of an older style/s can be relevant in a more contemporary context and can be built upon so as to avoid damaging the trust and commitment, which they have inherited. This also matches the concern of Alan Fox when he talked about how attempts to change behaviour,

“are more likely to be rationally informed if they rest on knowledge not only of the present structures of work and power.. but also of the historical nature and origins of the behaviours concerned. This permits informed judgements about their persistence and deep-rootedness and- since every change has its price- about the social costs that would be involved if attempts were made to impose such changes against the historical grain”
(1985: xii-xiii)

As Fox continues, it may be more beneficial, and less costly, to look for ways to fulfil managerial objectives that *“work with the historical grain”*. This leads on to the next section, where there is a discussion of the ‘drama of negotiation’, and a discussion of the character of union leadership, its interaction with managerial processes and its influence on, and relationship to, employee perceptions and attitudes within the workplace contexts.

Implications for the Union

The 'drama of negotiation'

The sections above have outlined how alongside negativity towards management, stood a desire for co-operation within the employment relationship, an underlying loyalty and a positive view of working in the lock industry. However, the discourse of workers also suggested that people have a view of the limits of this co-operation, especially with regard to relations between union and management. It is this that has provided a most interesting and significant area of findings. Here, the comparison between LockCo and KeyCo is most useful in outlining the ways in which union leadership, the bargaining relationship, and hence the "drama of negotiation" could be dramatically affected by significant change within the managerial structures, priorities and strategies of an organisation.

There is a clear suggestion that there should be a maintenance of some conflict of interest, active resistance and public antagonism between the union and management. The important point is that the terms of any co-operation with management at workplace level need to be carefully formulated if the support of members is to be maintained. It is not so much a question of whether to co-operate or not, but the terms of this co-operation. This research has thus provided a useful insight into the way in which the employment relationship can be managed from the union activist/representative's point of view. Many writers agree that the employment relationship involves a dialectic of conflict and co-operation (See Chapter Two) and this is clearly illustrated in employee perceptions at the lock companies also (See previous sections of this chapter). However, in terms of the consequences of this for the behaviour of union leaders and managers,

analysis often offers up dualistic models. For example, whether a union can be seen as moderate or militant, individualistic or collectivist, co-operative or adversarial, or a mixture, depending on the circumstances, and is concerned with outlining their relative benefits and disadvantages (Edwards, 1995; Kelly, 1996; Bacon and Storey, 1996). What this thesis provides, in contrast, is a presentation of the way in which the people involved in two workplace union organisations actually deal with this process of negotiation with management.

The convenor at LockCo noted that, 'a lot of my role and interaction is theatre', suggesting how the terms of engagement between management and union can be seen as a drama. This relates to a perspective of dramaturgical action and impression management (discussed in Chapter Two). The convenor believes that presentation of issues to membership is important,

Image is all important, [the new owner] is testimony to that, they say a lot but mean very little, it's all about rhetoric, presentation. The TUC school of thought says you have to tell the truth and that is right, but the way you present that truth is important, you have to present it in a way that will yield confidence.⁴¹

Staying with the dramaturgical metaphor, such action fits with the management of meaning and constructing of social situations ('framing'- Gardner and Avolio, 1998) and 'staging'-the management, appropriation, manipulation and development of scripts and symbols- Gardner and Avolio, 1998). The view is that if the union can persuade the membership that it has done all it can to protect the interests of employees, and has made some demonstrable advances, the members will stay behind the union even if the company still faces sweeping work re-organisation and 'unavoidable' redundancies. LockCo had begun to face similar restructuring to that which has been experienced at

KeyCo, however the shop stewards and members did not feel as with those at KeyCo, that the union is on 'management's side'. The convenor at LockCo was very aware that he had to retain the drama of being in opposition with management, and that the relationship was not one of the union being in management's pocket. Thus again, drawing on the dramaturgical metaphor, the 'performance' of the bargaining relationship is clear here, where scripted behaviours and relationships are enacted. (This relates to much of Kelly's debate (1996, 1998) suggesting the need for continued militancy within union strategies). The existence of conflict between managers and the union was seen as a positive aspect of the relationship. Thus the convenor related how a member had praised him for having 'a good old go' at the Operations Manager on the shopfloor. The convenor reported that they were just having a heated discussion about an issue, but that this was typical of the views of most of the members. This is a prime example of the way in which people have shifting world-views or frames of reference. While the shopfloor have positive expectations of co-operation between the union and management, their consciousness is ambivalent, with shifting frames of reference between conflict and co-operation.

A different situation was found at KeyCo where people felt that the union had 'sold us down the river' and this was reflected in their opinions of the union as being 'on management's side'. This related to the feelings voiced by members that the union is powerless to help them and has had little demonstrable effect in the workplace. At KeyCo the emphasis had been on a different type of 'performance', a very public co-operation with management, with the convenor sharing the view of managers that the work organisation changes will be good for the workforce. The terms of engagement

⁴¹ Diary entry by the LockCo convenor.

between the union and management have therefore been managed differently at KeyCo. The proposition here, is that the divergence in attitudes towards the workplace union can be explained in part, by variations in the processes of union organisation (within the context of changing managerial strategies and structures); most notably: communication within the union, involvement and participation of members in union business, and the degree of separation between union leaders and rank and file. This in turn influences the way in which the union meets (or engages) with management and how this engagement is viewed by members.

The character of union leadership

The gap between the views of the convenor and those of the rank and file at KeyCo was evident. At LockCo, by contrast, there appeared to be significant mutual support between the convenor, the stewards and the members, reflected in the expressions of trust which members voiced and the support and cheery optimism demonstrated at shop steward's committee meetings. The LockCo convenor was not convinced that the restructuring would yield benefits for members and in this, he demonstrated a different view to that of the convenor at KeyCo. While she was convinced that the changes are for the good of members, the LockCo convenor does not feel positively about the proposals.

As a diary entry of 10th October 1997 reveals

When attending a meeting such as today's, one is left with feelings of no pride. Where is the Department of Trade and Industry now these job losses are announced. Should they not be saying to [the multi-national], 'you assured us that your purchase of LockCo would be good for the industry'. The acquisition may be good for the shareholders.. but for the people of LockTown, it is another hammer blow to an already beleaguered industry.

The convenor also felt that the union at KeyCo 'missed a golden opportunity', in not demanding trade offs such as education, training, and invigoration of the apprenticeship scheme, in parallel to restructuring. In return, the support that he received from the membership gave him the confidence to stand up to management. He was thus confident that the union could resist any equalisation of terms and conditions across the two firms, which would negatively affect his members at LockCo. Overall, the convenor at LockCo demonstrated a far more participatory and collectivist style (See Chapter Two) than the KeyCo convenor. In terms of the dramaturgical metaphor, there is evidence here of the different ways in which the social situation at the firm was 'framed' so as to '*shape the general perspective upon which information is presented and interpreted*' (Gardner and Avolio, 1998: 41) and 'scripted', so as to define the scene and provide '*emergent guides for collective consciousness*' (Gardner and Avolio, 1998: 41). At LockCo, there appeared to be more consistency in terms of interpretation of this 'script' and willingness to act collectively as a result, than at KeyCo.

The lay membership and shop stewards thus also had some kind of defining role on policy and placed limitations on the autonomy of the convenor at LockCo, indicating that more of a 'two-way' relationship existed which links with the studies of Darlington (1994) and Fairbrother (1989). Members were willing to rally around in support of the union; demonstrated in the overwhelming acceptance by the workforce of the proposal for re-structuring at a mass meeting, which indicated their support of their union in its negotiations with the new management. Members also seemed willing to make a stand against management, which is consistent with Fosh's (1993) view of the way in which a participatory style can build on surges of membership participation. This again adds to the state of thinking on the concept of collectivism, pointing out that collective attitudes

are not only multi-dimensional, but are shifting and transient, changing over time and context depending on issues and circumstances.

Union/Management Relations

At neither firm, did an official apparatus exist for shop stewards and management to meet, and as discussed earlier, much of the negotiation rested on the informal personal relationship between the convenor and the personnel manager. There was thus an increased danger at both firms of this relationship being viewed by members as incorporated. Again, the point to be re-iterated is that the terms of this co-operation with management at workplace level need to be carefully formulated if the support of members is to be maintained. It is a public drama acted out in the workplace, which (as discussed earlier), was something acknowledged by the LockCo convenor. The 'performance' needs to be carefully 'framed' and 'scripted' (Gardner and Avolio, 1998; Goffman, 1959). The dual strategy of agreeing to engage with management while reassuring workers that the union is still independent and 'on their side' appears to have had success so far at LockCo. The union had been kept informed by management at most stages along the change process and had been able to demand the addition of beneficial clauses within the work re-organisation proposals. The communication channel between key managers and the union had become so embedded that in many cases, the union heard about a proposal or initiative before middle managers. Sometimes, senior managers used the convenor as the sole communication channel to employees, completely bypassing management levels. While the convenor had a very informal relationship with the management, this did not mean that managers had the power to dictate to the convenor. The convenor had been able to control the timing of meetings, demanding that representatives of the SSC are present, resisting unreasonable demands

from management to meet them at inconvenient times and places or when notice had been too short. This led to managers agreeing to reorganise such meetings. One incident involved the rescheduling of an important meeting, called at very short notice, because the convenor had already planned to attend his daughter's 'parent-teacher' night at school. The union thus did not appear to engage with management in a way that suggested a one-sided relationship or where the union could be said to be incorporated. The nature of the engagement between the union and management thus has an impact on how effective the union is able to be in terms of negotiation. The terms of engagement had been controlled at LockCo, objectively by not becoming subservient to management's agenda, and subjectively, by a public demonstration of independence and principled opposition.

In contrast, the convenor at KeyCo lacked the same degree of influence in setting either the agenda or the pace of change. She commented that while they did communicate easily when they were in meetings and negotiations, it was very difficult for her to get hold of managers to talk to them. Often she felt that managers used her deliberately to undermine other managers, giving her key information before managers in order to embarrass them. It is interesting to see the difference in perceptions of the same situation by the two convenors. At LockCo, the convenor saw this as evidence of the strength of the union as a communication channel, while at KeyCo, the convenor felt that this undermined her position. The irony of the KeyCo case is worth noting, in that while the convenor is criticised by members for being a management stooge, she was also treated with a degree of contempt by KeyCo management; indeed the union had become increasingly enfeebled at KeyCo. These comparisons between the two companies suggest that effective moderate trade union leadership needs a careful construction and public

presentation of relations. It is this that is an influence on shaping the views of workers towards their union. The union representatives at LockCo, had more of an entrenched position institutionally with management than did the union organisation at KeyCo. At LockCo, the union was a party to management decision-making and consultation meetings and was seen as a vital communication channel. However, this had not led to a loss of member support because there was still evidence that the union representatives had not taken on the management world-view, in contrast to how the union was perceived at KeyCo. This contributes to the incorporation debate, in recognising the complexity of the incorporation concept. The institutional position of the union at LockCo was viewed positively by members. Co-operation need not equate to 'incorporation', but co-operation without access to competing 'world views' and countervailing pressures, may lead to a view that the union is incorporated. Here, KeyCo workers' views of the union leaders as having taken on the 'world view' of management was an important factor in their negativity towards and lack of commitment to, the union.

Personal Leadership Style

At both companies, where much of the negotiation was informal in character and relations based on personal interactions between the union and managers, an emphasis was placed on the personal styles of the two convenors. At LockCo, the convenor deliberately aimed to lead the workplace organisation in a new direction, at odds with the traditional way in which the national union leaders have acted in the past, particularly with regard to their engagement with management. Firstly, he took an approach which emphasised the need to respond to member's wishes and expectations, departing from the moralistic (and perhaps more traditional) view of unionism which he saw as carrying the

'the baggage of socialism' where people should join the union out of idealistic principle. This more traditional view characterised the convenor at KeyCo. Compare her view for instance, on why trade unions should exist, 'everybody needs trade unions.. supporting the working class', with that of the convenor at LockCo: 'We can't continue being about unionism on a traditional basis, it's about helping individuals with their problems'. The LockCo Convenor, was also President of the union and so has had the opportunity to put forward many ideas and innovations for future development of the union. He was disappointed that his views about modernising the union were not shared by others. One example was the possibility of recruiting temporary workers, which the industry had been hiring in increasing numbers over the last five years. This was opposed by the Executive Committee, because agency workers were seen to threaten the jobs of their full time members. In comparison, the LockCo Convenor felt that as they had had little success in persuading the company not to use agency workers, they could recruit them and provide a service for them. Similar ideas about expanding recruitment to non-traditional areas such as the unemployed were also opposed.

There is also a link between leadership style and traditions of the occupational community. To a large extent, the convenor at KeyCo matched the traditional background of people in the national union, who had worked on the shopfloor in the lock industry all their lives. Indeed the General Secretary had been a polisher at LockCo. The General Secretary and the convenor at KeyCo, were seen as reaching their positions, in part, through the build up of patronage over many years of working in the factories. The LockCo convenor however, was not originally from the industrial town, and he felt therefore he did not have a similarly large body of patronage and had got to his position through success in negotiations on the shopfloor. This led to a feeling, on his part, that

the national union and the in-plant union organisation at LockCo were detached. The national union was heavily involved in negotiations with the multi-national owners at KeyCo. Many of the early negotiations were a team effort of the convenor and three full time officials, as she commented, 'I think they're with me on the way things are working here... I work well with them'. This is complemented by the support that the General Secretary indicated for the restructuring at KeyCo, when he attended the shop steward's committee meeting at LockCo soon after their own proposals for change were announced. As he stated, 'There are going to be some losers, but the change in the long term will be better. The system at [KeyCo] is.. better'. The KeyCo convenor's actions and behaviour were more influenced by the central union head quarters than was the union organisation at LockCo. Both the General Secretary and the KeyCo convenor separately commented on their close working relationship, whereas the LockCo convenor appeared to want to take a more independent path.

The convenor at LockCo remained unconvinced that the restructuring will yield all the benefits foreseen. He commented on how he felt quite isolated from the national union in his negotiations with the company. In addition, he set out deliberately to present an image of professionalism of the union organisation to management. He believed that his approach was different to that of the other convenors and officials of the national union, and more significantly was different to the traditional 'beer and sandwiches' image expected by management. He related an incident where the Managing Director had been astonished when he had commented that their strategic plans for the restructuring of the company were, 'basically Fordist with a bit of re-jigging', which led to an in depth discussion between them. The company owners also differentiated between the national union and that of KeyCo, and the union organisation at LockCo. An example involved the recent

discussions about the different Christmas bonuses given to both firms, when the company refused to give the same bonus to KeyCo until the convenor at LockCo had agreed, bypassing the overarching organisation of the national union. The union organisation at KeyCo was thus more dependent upon that of the national union, whereas, at LockCo, the union took a much more independent direction. The convenor at LockCo, perhaps can be seen as reflecting a situation of 'popular bossdom' (Turner, 1962). As the convenor commented, 'My popularity inside [LockCo] far outweighs my popularity outside'. There were also indications of the difficulty of collaboration between the union organisations at both firms, perhaps due to the different ways in which union process was carried out at each firm. Both convenors spoke of the traditional company rivalry that existed, with families remaining loyal to particular firms and the difficulty that the two convenors would have in coming to joint decisions. As the convenor at KeyCo commented, 'It's got to be done, but I know it's going to lead to a lot of falling out'.

In summary, there is much evidence to suggest that the nature of the union organisation at each workplace was very dependent on the personal style of the convenor. Terry (1982) identified that where effective local organisations existed, a single individual could be identified who was crucial to its success and to its continued existence, whom he called "key stewards". While his study was concerned with workplaces uncharacteristic of the two lock companies; (namely public sector sites with dispersed membership), similarities in the importance of these key stewards can be drawn out. Other studies have also pointed to the importance of the union leader's interpersonal skills (Kahn and Tannenbaum, 1954) and accessibility to members (Nicholson et al, 1980), as influences on membership commitment and participation. However, the

embeddedness of the traditions of the wider union organisation should not be overlooked in the emphasis on the personal leadership styles of the union leaders. An awareness of this was obvious in the concern of the LockCo convenor that the relationship between the union and management should be 'played out' in a certain way in order to meet members' expectations (linked to a dramaturgical perspective). However, both the convenors acknowledged the importance of their personal styles. At LockCo, the convenor indicated his anxiety about what would happen if he left the company, as much of its success rested on his personal leadership and abilities. Similarly, at KeyCo, the convenor placed her close working relationship with management and her support of the work changes as largely based on her own personal views. In addition, the interplay between union leadership style and membership attitudes should be seen as more of a two way process (See Chapter Two). The dynamic of the direction of influence between union leader and membership attitude is hard to trace, indeed the fact that the rank and file can have a defining influence on leadership behaviour was discussed earlier in this section. However, in contrast, much of the literature testifies to the defining influence of the leader (Barling et al, 1992), and there is obviously a research gap here, where the dynamics of the relationship from the membership point of view need to be traced more carefully. Whilst focusing on the influence of the union leader, this thesis has pointed to the somewhat circular nature of the relationship, which is discussed in more detail in the following section.

Structure and consciousness

In order to discuss possible alternative explanations for understanding the findings, it should be noted that coexisting alongside the changes in union leadership style, are obviously, managerial strategies and priorities. At KeyCo, management had restructured their work organisation far more profoundly than at LockCo. As discussed earlier, as

part of this work restructuring, management had also (intentionally or otherwise), restructured the basis of their relationship with the union, effectively denying an independent role for unionism. This thesis has drawn out the fact that the particular union leadership style is integral to the effectiveness of the union in negotiations and in maintaining membership support. However, at KeyCo, having faced dramatic change earlier, the ability of the convenor to present herself as performing a useful and independent job had been significantly reduced. Within a wider context of trade union weakness, perhaps the ability of a union leader to display their independence may relate more to management's preparedness to allow the union to do this. However, the issue here is that while the reorganisation had only just begun at LockCo, the same radical change was inevitable and the new management team were now from the same owning corporation to that at KeyCo. Despite this, there were differences in the ways that each union leader approached the 'drama of negotiation'. While unions often are forced to operate on a terrain that is largely defined by managerial preference, unions can still choose to respond in different ways.⁴²

This thesis has highlighted the interplay between structure and consciousness where the person is both a creator and object of their situation. The evidence indicated how the personal leadership style of the convenor at LockCo encouraged the participation of stewards and members and succeeded in generating the active support of rank and file on a number of occasions. Conversely, the leadership style of the convenor at KeyCo had engendered the apathy of both her stewards and members as they became increasingly excluded from union processes. Perhaps, more significantly, the convenor at KeyCo became detached from the views and concerns of her members, and increasingly came to

⁴² Informed by personal communication with Mike Terry, February, 1999.

see the terrain of issues bargained over by herself on behalf of her members as defined by the company. The point of interest here is that at KeyCo, we find the convenor was creating and reinforcing a situation, which simultaneously, she felt a victim of. However, this should not be read as demonstrating the fact that the union leaders at the two workplaces were simply victims of circumstance. This is in line with the argument of Walton and McKersie (1965: 9), that people act purposefully within the context of labour negotiations. As part of interaction within the employment relationship, the purposeful action of the chief negotiators is emphasised: *“a position which has influence and is instrumental in achieving results... moreover, even with respect to the potential influence he does possess, he must choose and time his tactics wisely”* (Walton and McKersie, 1965: 282). It is certainly the case that the role of management in their position as chief negotiators has been underplayed in this thesis (partly due to issues of access) and is seen as an area for future research (see ‘Epilogue’). On the other hand, there is much to support the view that management at the two firms were similar in orientation and strategy, although the fieldwork was carried out when the firms were in different states of reorganisation. However, the evidence does point to the influence of the union leader at the two firms. Differences in managerial policy at LockCo (and their preparedness to allow the union to have an independent role), can be explained partly by the different way that the union leader engaged in the social situation of the employment relationship, which in turn affected members’ attitudes, and so on, in the circle of relationships and influences. The beginning of this part of Chapter Five stated that this thesis provided a useful insight into the way the people involved in two workplace union organisations actually dealt with the process of negotiation. In this, the analysis of Walton and McKersie (1965) can be extended somewhat. They pointed out the difficulty chief negotiators face in changing behavioural expectations of their wider organisational

affiliations during labour negotiation situations. Their analysis pointed to procedures for 'tactical assignments' to lessen intraorganisational conflict as the negotiations took place (see Walton and McKersie, 1965: 312-340). However, this thesis extends upon this, pointing out that the employment relationship is in a constant process of negotiation, not just at particular moments of wage demands or grievance disputes for example. Thus, the union leaders take action to 'frame', 'script' and 'perform' over a longer period of time, taking into consideration deeply embedded views, opinions and traditions of context. What is important is their everyday management of relations within their own organisations as well as when they specifically engage and interact with management.

Returning to the discussion of the specific way the two convenors played out their 'roles', relating back to Batstone et al's (1977) typology, both convenors could be seen as 'representative', rather than 'delegate' union leaders. Both took initiatives and made policies autonomously. However, they were different kinds of representatives. At KeyCo, a situation had arisen where there was a 'vicious circle', where members had become apathetic about their union organisation and while complaining about the lack of accountability of their convenor, they did little to ensure there was more union democracy. In the end, they effectively allowed the convenor to act in the way that she did, largely through lack of action. In turn, the convenor reinforced this situation, building on her experience of the apathy of the membership, which in turn legitimised her stance. At LockCo, the convenor had in practice, a similar level of autonomous control. However, there was more evidence perhaps of a 'virtuous circle', where the convenor effectively had the mandate of membership and where their experience led them to trust that he would act in their best interests. This thesis thus suggests, countering the alternative discussed above, that the union leader at KeyCo, while facing

a context that was detrimental to independent unionism, can also be seen to have contributed to the lack of an independent role which the union held in the company. This relates also to an explanation of the continued resilience of the union organisation and maintenance of a view that the union was salient despite external negative factors in the wider context. As Ackers et al (1996) emphasised, it is at the workplace level that the contours of British industrial relations are shaped. Here, union leadership styles and members' experiences of union action or inaction can mediate the impact of negative factors on the wider trade union movement.

In summary, in order for the union to maintain credibility with members, the truism that the way in which the union engages with management has to be carefully considered, is highlighted. The findings of this thesis complement literature on this issue, emphasising that any practice of 'Social Partnership' cannot be only on management's terms (Kelly, 1996, 1998; Ackers and Payne, 1998). Management were adamant that the restructuring they proposed would take place at both companies, and unions find themselves with limited room for manoeuvre when the changes are seen as necessary for the survival of the company. However, 'necessity' can be seen as socially defined, where the world views of management and unions are developed in their interactions with each other. It is this that defines what is possible or desirable in which particular circumstances. Co-operation with management may be a pre-requisite, for the trade union to have any influence on the way in which change is brought about. However, most lock workers still felt that there was a conflict of interests between workers and management, which the union must be seen to recognise, if they are not to be perceived as incorporated. At a wider level, this viewpoint is clear in the TUC rhetoric of Social Partnership. The basis for partnership is on participation around common interests centred on corporate success

and employment security, which remains firmly embedded in a pluralist and collectivist tradition, eschewing a simple identity of interest between employer and workforce (Ackers and Payne, 1996; Monks, 1996a, 1996b). The LockCo convenor also reflected this position when he stated:

'the traditional trade unionist cannot function in modern industrial situations. It's not about confrontation now, it's not adversarialism. We'll never be corporate partners, we'll always have conflict, but we need to be able to know how these companies operate, we need to be able to understand and talk in their language.'

At LockCo, the unions' oppositional stance did not appear to have weakened their position but led to management being more careful about consulting and involving the union and appears to have led to significant bargaining gains for members. Certainly, at the time of research, it was early days in the negotiation process at LockCo, but so far the convenor appeared to have negotiated a relationship which while accepting co-operation, did not deny the existence of a basic conflict of interest.

Final Summary

Two themes emerged specifically from the comparative elements of the thesis, over and above the extensive data that emerged from the two cases. Firstly, the longitudinal study at LockCo illuminated the interesting debates around what happened to employee attitudes when a traditional paternalistic approach to management was gradually dismantled. Secondly, the comparison between LockCo and KeyCo threw up the ways in which union leadership, the bargaining relationship and hence, the “drama of negotiation”, could be affected by significant change within the managerial structure and strategy of an organisation. It was this latter comparison that was most beneficial in identifying changes in the ‘drama of negotiation’, union leadership and changed managerial strategies, priorities and structures. The LockCo comparison was vital here in charting the longitudinal change, and in bringing to light, the broader sociological and historical traditions of both of the companies.

Within these two major themes, other significant points are made, refining and developing the state of thinking on a number of ideas. Firstly, there is a contribution to the ‘dual commitment’ debates, developing the discussion of the problematic nature of ‘dual commitment’ as a concept for industrial relations study. The findings indicated the overall complexity of perceptions of commitment, identity and trust, which are not dealt with effectively by a view that commitment is static over time or context, or which leads to a simple trade off between rival commitments. The repertoires and shared perceptions among the groups of lock workers demonstrated ambivalences, contradictions and ambiguities, with conflicting frames of reference coexisting.

Related to this, there was an emphasis on the value of qualitative research within a broad ethnographic paradigm, focusing in on the discourse of organisational members and on the

particular workplace contexts where the research is carried out. This has the benefits of building up a detailed picture or 'thick description', and allows us to see the ambivalence, contradictions, as well as the consistencies within views and opinions of the heterogeneous workforce. Standardised concepts such as collectivism, individualism, solidarity, and commitment were unpacked and analysed. Such an approach allowed a contextualised representation of workplace views; which for the lock workers; focused on their pluralistic perceptions of the employment relationship, underlying potential for commitment to both union and company, and an assessment of the employment relationship as made up of 'structured antagonisms', embedded in historical experiences and expectations.

Thirdly, the thesis focused on the development of the 'drama' of the employment relationship, derived not only from an understanding of the role of union leadership, but also from the nature of the bargaining relationship itself. With regard to the former, analysis focused on the role of the union leaders in managing the 'ambiguity' of their relations with management, and the influence of leadership style in shaping worker views and opinions. The latter relates to the rituals and procedures of the bargaining relationship, which embody certain understandings regarding 'stage directions' and 'casting', pointing to the circular nature of influences within the relationship between union leaders and their members. The contextual and qualitative focus of this thesis helped to develop a view on what these 'accepted' rituals and procedures were perceived to be, by employees within the lock companies' contexts. Such ideas can be used within current discussions about union renewal and future internal union strategies, as well as to debates about the way in which unions engage with management. It has particular salience in the current political and economic climate of British industrial relations where the European Community is having an increasing influence on policy (for example the European Works Councils) and where there is frequent recourse to a rhetoric of Social Partnership from both the TUC and government.

Connected to this last point is fourthly, the interesting analysis of the implications of a dismantling of a traditional paternalistic management style. Historic traditions were formative of a particular culture at both LockCo and KeyCo, which was found to underpin the psychological contract, and informed employee perceptions about levels of commitment, trust and expected roles and behaviours of the parties within the employment relationship. Management strategy which takes no cognisance of this, stands to relinquish the positive potential in the employment relationship which was found to exist in the past. Thus, rather than an archaism, certain elements of an older style may be relevant in a contemporary context and may be built upon to foster trust and commitment.

Epilogue

The thesis as the fieldwork stands, is now complete and one of the most difficult things for me as a researcher was 'letting go' of the project. I had to establish a cut off point of the thesis and decide from a certain point in time, that I had to stop tracking the dynamics and processes at the lock companies. This was difficult, because it is obvious that life continues at the lock companies and the dynamics of the employment relationship are constantly changing, being recreated and re-constructed. If I carried the fieldwork out now, some of the findings will need to be amended. For example, people who I had interviewed often communicated, (through the respondent validation forms, or speaking to me on the shopfloor), that certain incidents had occurred and they had other opinions to add, which highlighted the continuous process of change. However, this is always an issue with research of any kind. This is why it is reassuring to know that this thesis has set the foundations for a continuing project at the two lock companies. The aspiration is that the involvement in the lock companies will not end here, and the rich array of themes, debates and issues brought out in this thesis, will serve to indicate that there is still much to find out and try to understand about workplace relations in the lock industry. The lock industry in LockTown is obviously in transition at the moment, where the full effects of the merging of the two largest firms are still unknown, and this thesis was only able to offer possibilities for the ways that things will turn out. LockCo in particular, was at a critical turning point when the fieldwork was being carried out, where the exact effects of re-structuring on the nature of work, relations between worker groups and between the three parties within the employment relationship can only be guessed at. Such issues can only be addressed with future research. Looking to that future, it is useful here outline what can be seen as future areas of study emerging from this thesis.

Firstly, the contacts within the LockUnion could be built upon. It would be of great value to delve even deeper within an ethnographic-centred methodology. Perhaps future research could involve shadowing a key figure, such as the convenor, for an extended period of time, accompanying them on their daily routine, offering an even more in-depth observation of the situation. It would also be worthwhile extending this to involve analysis outside of the lock industry and within different unions to gain a comparative viewpoint. This would allow development of the idea of the 'drama of negotiation', looking at the contextualised nature of perceptions of the accepted rituals and procedures of dramas in different contexts. Also this would provide comparisons to investigate the importance of the role of individual union leadership style in influencing and being influenced by accepted understandings of behaviour in labour negotiations.

The voices of management could be integrated into the discussion. There is some evidence to suggest that with the merging of the two companies and their management structures, there may be more management willingness at LockCo, to participate in a research project. There is some continuity in management personnel, which would allow some longitudinal analysis across the period to provide comparison with the management interviews from other projects. The issue of who makes up 'them' could be explored in more depth by looking at different levels of management: divisions within the group. Debates about the utility of older management styles and working 'with the historical grain' could also be brought into the discussions with managers. This could extend the discussion brought out in the last chapter, of the problems and possibilities of building change strategies, policies and styles upon existing cultural foundations.

The gender segregation of work within the lock companies was not extensively developed in this thesis. This could be investigated more fully in the future, presenting a picture of

working life in an industry with an even proportion of gender, but differentiated roles, within the workplaces. This will become more pertinent if the proposed flexibility of job roles proposed by the new multi-national owners is put into action, where men and women are expected to be able to carry out a variety of jobs, some of which had been customarily a male or female preserve. Here, a variety of issues could be investigated with reference to Cockburn (1991, 1983) and her study of gendered job roles, or Collinson's (1992) study of masculinity and gendered identity on the shopfloor.

Overall, there is still much to find out at the lock companies and much potential for future research. I look forward to being involved in the next major study at LockCo, perhaps when another fifteen years has passed.

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Appendix 1a

Interview Agenda for LockCo Employees 1996

Your Job

This section relates to the work that you do

- 1) Please could you just briefly describe your job.**
- 2) How skilled is your job?**
- 3) How would you rate the conditions in which you work?**
- 4) Is your job interesting?**
- 5) How hard would you say that you work?**
- 6) Who has control over the way your work is organised?**
- 7) Who has control over the speed at which you work?**
- 8) What decisions are you able to make about your work?**
- 9) Would you like to have more control over your work?**

In what areas?

- 10) Do you think you get a fair wage?**
- 11) What do you think about the wage differentials here?**
- 12) Do you have a large group of people working with you?**

About how many people?

- 13) Do you see the people that you work with outside socially?**
- 14) Do you feel that you share a sense of identity/solidarity with the people that you work with?**

If an ambiguous answer given, offer the following categories as suggestions.

- As employees**
- As a department**
- As union members**
- As a company**
- None of these**

- 15) Could you see yourself working outside of the lock industry?**

- If yes, where, in what areas of work?**
- If no, why not?**

- 16) Do you think that younger generations of your family and relations will follow you into the lock industry?**

What is the justification for the answer given?

Unions

I'm now going to ask you some questions about trade unions; first of all questions about unions in general and what unions ought to do; and then I'm going to ask you about your union and what the LockUnion actually does.

- 1) Why do you think that trade unions in general exist?
- 2) Should unions have the right to strike?
- If yes, over what issues?
 - If no, why not?
- 3) Should unions try and influence government?
- If yes, in what way, over what issues?
 - If no, why not?
- 4) Should unions be linked to political parties?
- If yes, which one?
 - If no, why not?
- 5) Why are you a member of the LockUnion?
- What does it have to offer you as a member?
 - What do you think about the individual benefits that the union offers?

What does your union do?

1) This question relates to the LockUnion and how effective it is; how well it does its job.

Ask the general question and then use the Response Card 1 if difficulty faced.

Discuss the following areas

- Negotiating pay
- Negotiating conditions of work
- Protecting jobs
- The way your work is organised
- Maintaining or increasing your job satisfaction
- Giving a voice to employees

Response Card 1

VERY EFFECTIVE	EFFECTIVE	QUITE EFFECTIVE	NOT EFFECTIVE
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Union Power:

Here the question is looking at what the LockUnion is able to do and what things make it effective.

1) First of all an open ended question, What do you consider are the characteristics of a powerful union?

Please could you tell me how important you think the following things are to whether a union is seen as powerful or to making a union powerful.

If an ambiguous answer given, offer the 1-4 scale of importance as a point of reference where 1 is 'Very Important' and 4 is 'Not Important'

- Size of union. Do you think it matters how large or small the membership is?
- Ability to strike
- Good relationship with management
- Is it good to have a close relationship or a more 'at arms length' relationship?
- Success in pay settlements
- Ability to win common law claims
- Ability to resist management
- Influence in the TUC
- Political influence

2) How do you think the LockUnion measures up to the characteristics of a powerful union that you've just given? Do you see the LockUnion as a powerful union?

If not, where does the LockUnion fall down?

The LockUnion and the local community

1) Does the LockUnion get involved in the local community outside of the work place?

If yes, in what kind of areas and events is the LockUnion involved?

Should the union be involved and in what areas?

Suggestions

- Sports
- Charities
- Social events
- Local politics
- Local groups

2) Do you think that the level of involvement in the local community is sufficient or should it be increased or decreased?

3) What do you think about the union events such as the Valentines Dance and Members' Days Out?

- Do you get involved?
- Do you think that they are popular?

4) Some people say that the union is taking the place of the old employers with their involvement in the community. Do you agree?

Representativeness, Accountability, Communication

1) How well do you think that your interests (the reasons why you are a member that you mentioned before) are met by the LockUnion?

Can use a response card if difficulty faced.

Response Card 2

COMPLETELY	PARTIALLY	RARELY	NOT AT ALL
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2) Do you think that union action; what the union reps and officials actually do, reflects the opinions and views of members about issues?

- Are there issues that the union acts faster/quicker on?
- Are there areas where you think that members' opinions are not heard and acted upon?

3) Are you satisfied with the amount of information from and communication that you get from your union representatives?

Can use response card if difficulty faced

Response Card 3

VERY SATISFIED	SATISFIED	QUITE SATISFIED	DISSATISFIED
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4) How active would you say you are in the union

5) Do you attend union meetings?

6) Would you consider standing as a shop steward?

- If not, what are the reasons?

For Shop Stewards

1) How long have you been a shop steward?

2) Why did you become a shop steward?

3) How many people do you represent?

4) What do you see as the main roles of a shop steward?

5) How do you get the views of your members?

6) How are these views represented to the union and to management?

Management

Here the questions are looking at management's job, and management's relationship with the work force and with the union.

1) How much contact do you have with management?

- Different levels of management i.e. Top, Middle, Junior:-Foremen upwards

2) Do you think that management, and particularly top management, should make an effort to meet and talk to you on the shop floor?

3) What do you think is the job of management?

Here are some possible alternative suggestions of a manager's job. Could you tell me which of the following statements apply to the management in this company.

Use response card as an aid

Response Card 4

YES	NO	MAYBE
-----	----	-------

Discuss the following areas:-

- To make sure that people do their work
- To give knowledge and expertise
- To take care of administration
- To give advice and help when needed
- Ensuring that working conditions are safe and comfortable
- Ensuring that employees are happy in their jobs/ have job satisfaction

4) Can you tell me which of these areas is an area of management control, an area of union control or and area of joint control in this work place, and then which of these areas do you think should be an area of management control, an area of union control or and area of joint control?

Use response card as an aid

Response Card 5

MANAGEMENT CONTROL	UNION CONTROL	JOINT CONTROL
-----------------------	------------------	---------------

- The way work is organised
- The speed work is done
- The introduction of new technology
- Redundancies
- Recruitment
- Pay

5) What kind of relationship do you think that the LockUnion has with management here?

- *e.g. friendly, antagonistic?*

6) Are there situations or issues where the LockUnion ought to resist management?

- If yes, in what situations or what issues?
- If no, why not?

7) What do you think about joint decision-making schemes such as unions on the board?

8) Do you think that in the last 10 years, management has altered its way of dealing with workers? How?

The Company and the local community

1) Does LockCo get involved in the local community outside of the work place?

If yes, in what kind of areas and events is LockCo involved?

Should the company be involved and in what areas?

Suggestions

- Sports
- Charities

- Social events
- Local politics
- Local groups

2) Do you think that the level of involvement in the local community is sufficient or should it be increased or decreased?

Union/Management Relations

Here questions will look at the relationship between the LockUnion and the management at LockCo

1) What do you think about the overall level of trust that exists between management and workers here?

If difficulty answering is found, ask them to look at trust on a scale running from high level of trust to low level of trust, which of these statements applies to this company?

2) Has the level of trust changed since the early 1980s?

- What are the reasons for any change?

3) How does this compare with the level of trust between the union and employees?

4) Do you think that management shares the same goals as people on the shop floor?

- If yes, what goals are shared
- If no, why not?

5) Which of these statements on this card do you think best sums up this company?

Response Card 6

We work together as a team
We are all individuals with our own interests
A Them and Us situation, management against employees
A Them and us, union against management
Department against department

6) Do you feel more of a sense of identity with the union or with management?

7) Do you think that it is possible for you to be loyal to management and to the union at the same time?

8) Could you tell me what your personal attitude is to these statements about the company?

Use response card if necessary

Response Card 7

AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	DISAGREE
STRONGLY	SLIGHTLY	SLIGHTLY	STRONGLY

- I am willing to go out of my way in order to help LockCo be successful
- I feel a sense of loyalty to LockCo

- I feel a sense of pride in working for LockCo
- My values and that of the company are similar
- I could just as well be working for a different organisation as long as the work is similar

9) Could you tell me what your personal attitude is to these statements about the union?

Use the response card as an aid.

- I feel a sense of pride in being part of the LockUnion
- My values and the values of the LockUnion are similar
- I could just as well be a member of another union and get the same benefits
- Would things have been worse for the workers at LockCo over the last few years without the union?
- How important do you think the members' interests are to the LockUnion?

Response Card 8

VERY IMPORTANT	IMPORTANT	QUITE IMPORTANT	NOT IMPORTANT
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Appendix 1b

Draft Interview Agenda LockCo Employees 1983 : Question areas to be covered.

Typed and transferred on line from type-writer hard copy.

Personal Details

Name, age.

When did you join [LockCo]?

Where were you employed before?

What department are you in: who is your boss?

What is your job: describe.

Have you had other jobs in the company?

How were you recruited?

Do you, or have you had relatives in the company?

Shop steward or convenor

Are you or have you been a steward or convenor?

Who is your shop steward?

What is the job of a steward?

What involvement in the TU do you have?

How often in the last year have you attended branch meetings?

How long have you been a steward?

How many people do you represent?

Why did you become a steward?

What is the job of a steward?

How do you ascertain the views of your members?

How do their views get represented? To the TU, to management?

How is TU policy made?

How many branch meetings have you attended in the last year?

Work and Management

Please describe your job.

How skilled is your job?

How would you rate the conditions in which you work?

How hard would you say that you worked?

How long did it take to learn your job?

How would you describe your job in terms of interest?
 Are output levels controlled by management or you?
 Who is your manager? Title?
 What is management's job?
 Are top management's goals the same as those of the workforce?
 How is your level of pay determined?
 What is your system of payment?
 Is work organised in the best way?
 Are there changes in the organisation of work that you'd like to see?
 How much control is there over the way you work?
 over the speed at which you work?
 How much control should the TU have over these issues?
 What are the aims of LockCo?
 Are profits desirable?
 Do you see the company as a team?
 What part should the TU play in the running of the firm?
 How far should the TU resist what management may want?
 Do you get a fair wage?
 Should workers co-operate with management to improve productivity?
 Should stewards co-operate with management to improve productivity?
 Should management be able to reorganise work whenever necessary?
 Should management be able to fire or make redundant?
 Does the TU conflict with management?
 Are wage differentials in the company fair?
 What changes would you like to see in the TU?

How has working changed in the TU since you joined?

Trade Unions in general

Why do TUs exist?
 Are they a good thing: issue of power?
 Should they influence governments? In which areas?
 Should TUs cultivate co-operation with management?
 Should TUs be linked to political parties?
 Do you support a political party?
 Should TUs be able to strike?

Are strikes necessary, desirable, in which situations?

Is the closed shop a good thing? Why?

What is the TU's role in protecting jobs?

Appendix 1c

Interview Agenda for KeyCo Employees

Your Job

This section relates to the work that you do

- 1) Please could you just briefly describe your job.
- 2) How skilled is your job?
- 3) What are the main changes that have occurred over the time you have worked at KeyCo?

When have the most drastic changes occurred

What specific changes have come in since the multi-national took over in 1989?

- 4) How were the changes introduced?
- 5) What input did you feel you had into the change process?
- 6) Who benefits from the changes?
- 7) What were the main impacts of the changes?
- 8) Do you know why the changes were introduced, what were the objectives of the company and what changes will be introduced in the future?
- 9) How would you rate the conditions in which you work?
- 10) Is your job interesting?
- 11) How hard would you say that you work?
- 12) Who has control over the way your work is organised?
- 13) Who has control over the speed at which you work?
- 14) What decisions are you able to make about your work?
- 15) Would you like to have more control over your work?
In what areas?
- 16) Do you think you get a fair wage?
- 17) What do you think about the wage differentials here?
- 18) Do you have a large group of people working with you?

About how many people?

- 19) Do you see the people that you work with outside socially?
- 20) Do you feel that you share a sense of identity/solidarity with the people that you work with?

If an ambiguous answer given, offer the following categories as suggestions.

- As employees
- As a department
- As union members
- As a company

- None of these

21) Could you see yourself working outside of the lock industry?

- If yes, where, in what areas of work?
- If no, why not?

22) Do you think that younger generations of your family and relations will follow you into the lock industry?

What is the justification for the answer given?

Unions

I'm now going to ask you some questions about trade unions; first of all questions about unions in general and what unions ought to do, and then I'm going to ask you about your union and what the LockUnion actually does.

1) Why do you think that trade unions in general exist?

2) Should unions have the right to strike?

- If yes, over what issues?
- If no, why not?

3) Should unions try and influence government?

- If yes, in what way, over what issues?
- If no, why not?

4) Should unions be linked to political parties?

- If yes, which one?
- If no, why not?

5) Why are you a member of the LockUnion?

- What does it have to offer you as a member?
- What do you think about the individual benefits that the union offers?

What does your union do?

1) This question relates to the LockUnion and how effective it is; how well it does its job.

Ask the general question and then use the Response Card 1 if difficulty faced.

Discuss the following areas

- Negotiating pay
- Negotiating conditions of work
- Protecting jobs
- The way your work is organised
- Maintaining or increasing your job satisfaction
- Giving a voice to employees

Response Card 1

VERY EFFECTIVE	EFFECTIVE	QUITE EFFECTIVE	NOT EFFECTIVE
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Union Power

Here the question is looking at what the LockUnion is able to do and what things make it effective.

1) First of all an open ended question, What do you consider are the characteristics of a powerful union?

Please could you tell me how important you think the following things are to whether a union is seen as powerful or to making a union powerful.

If an ambiguous answer given, offer the 1-4 scale of importance as a point of reference where 1 is 'Very Important' and 4 is 'Not Important'

- Size of union. Do you think it matters how large or small the membership is?
- Ability to strike
- Good relationship with management
- Is it good to have a close relationship or a more 'at arms length' relationship?
- Success in pay settlements
- Ability to win common law claims
- Ability to resist management
- Influence in the TUC
- Political influence

2) How do you think the LockUnion measures up to the characteristics of a powerful union that you've just given? Do you see the LockUnion as a powerful union?

If not, where does the LockUnion fall down?

The LockUnion and the local community

1) Does the LockUnion get involved in the local community outside of the work place?

If yes, in what kind of areas and events is the LockUnion involved?

Should the union be involved and in what areas?

Suggestions

- Sports
- Charities
- Social events
- Local politics
- Local groups

2) Do you think that the level of involvement in the local community is sufficient or should it be increased or decreased?

3) What do you think about the union events such as the Valentines Dance and Members' Days Out?

- Do you get involved?
- Do you think that they are popular?

4) Some people say that the union is taking the place of the old employers with their involvement in the community. Do you agree?

Representativeness, Accountability, Communication

1)How well do you think that your interests (the reasons why you are a member that you mentioned before) are met by the LockUnion?

Can use a response card if difficulty faced.

Response Card 2

COMPLETELY	PARTIALLY	RARELY	NOT AT ALL
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2)Do you think that union action; what the union reps and officials actually do, reflects the opinions and views of members about issues?

- Are there issues that the union acts faster/quicker on?
- Are there areas where you think that members' opinions are not heard and acted upon?

3) Are you satisfied with the amount of information from and communication that you get from your union representatives?

Can use response card if difficulty faced

Response Card 3

VERY SATISFIED	SATISFIED	QUITE SATISFIED	DISSATISFIED
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4) How active would you say you are in the union

5) Do you attend union meetings?

6) Would you consider standing as a shop steward?

- If not, what are the reasons?

For Shop Stewards

1) How long have you been a shop steward?

2) Why did you become a shop steward?

3) How many people do you represent?

4) What do you see as the main roles of a shop steward?

5)How do you get the views of your members?

6) How are these views represented to the union and to management?

Management

Here the questions are looking at management's job, and management's relationship with the work force and with the union.

1) How much contact do you have with management?

- Different levels of management i.e. Top, Middle, Junior:-Foremen upwards

2) Do you think that management, and particularly top management, should make an effort to meet and talk to you on the shop floor?

3) What do you think is the job of management?

Here are some possible alternative suggestions of a manager's job. Could you tell me which of the following statements apply to the management in this company.

Use response card as an aid

Response Card 4

YES	NO	MAYBE
-----	----	-------

- To make sure that people do their work
- To give knowledge and expertise
- To take care of administration
- To give advice and help when needed
- Ensuring that working conditions are safe and comfortable
- Ensuring that employees are happy in their jobs/ have job satisfaction

4) Can you tell me which of these areas is an area of management control, an area of union control or and area of joint control in this work place, and then which of these areas do you think should be an area of management control, an area of union control or and area of joint control?

Use response card as an aid

Response Card 5

MANAGEMENT CONTROL	UNION CONTROL	JOINT CONTROL
-----------------------	------------------	---------------

- The way work is organised
- The speed work is done
- The introduction of new technology
- Redundancies
- Recruitment
- Pay

5) What kind of relationship do you think that the LockUnion has with management here?

- e.g. friendly, antagonistic?

6) Are there situations or issues where the LockUnion ought to resist management?

- If yes, in what situations or what issues?
- If no, why not?

7) What do you think about joint decision-making schemes such as unions on the board?

8) Do you think that in the last 10 years, management has altered its way of dealing with workers? How?

The Company and the local community

1) Does KeyCo get involved in the local community outside of the work place?

If yes, in what kind of areas and events is KeyCo involved?

Should the company be involved and in what areas?

Suggestions

- Sports
- Charities
- Social events
- Local politics
- Local groups

2) Do you think that the level of involvement in the local community is sufficient or should it be increased or decreased?

Union/Management Relations

Here questions will look at the relationship between the LockUnion and the management at KeyCo

1) What do you think about the overall level of trust that exists between management and workers here?

If difficulty answering is found, ask them to look at trust on a scale running from high level of trust to low level of trust, which of these statements applies to this company?

2) Has the level of trust changed since the early 1980s?

- What are the reasons for any change?

3) How does this compare with the level of trust between the union and employees?

4) Do you think that management shares the same goals as people on the shop floor?

- If yes, what goals are shared
- If no, why not?

5) Which of these statements on this card do you think best sums up this company?

Response Card 6

We work together as a team
We are all individuals with our own interests
A Them and Us situation, management against employees
A Them and us, union against management
Department against department

- 6) Do you feel more of a sense of identity with the union or with management?
- 7) Do you think that it is possible for you to be loyal to management and to the union at the same time?
- 8) Could you tell me what your personal attitude is to these statements about the company?

Use response card if difficulty faced.

Response Card 7

AGREE STRONGLY	AGREE SLIGHTLY	DISAGREE SLIGHTLY	DISAGREE STRONGLY
-------------------	-------------------	----------------------	----------------------

- I am willing to go out of my way in order to help KeyCo be successful
- I feel a sense of loyalty to KeyCo
- I feel a sense of pride in working for KeyCo
- My values and that of the company are similar
- I could just as well be working for a different organisation as long as the work is similar

- 9) Could you tell me what your personal attitude is to these statements about the union?

Use response card if difficulty faced.

- I feel a sense of pride in being part of the LockUnion
- My values and the values of the LockUnion are similar
- I could just as well be a member of another union and get the same benefits
- Would things have been worse for the workers at KeyCo over the last few years without the union?
- How important do you think the members' interests are to the LockUnion?

Response Card 8

VERY IMPORTANT	IMPORTANT	QUITE IMPORTANT	NOT IMPORTANT
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Appendix 1b:2

Interview Agenda with KeyCo Managers

THE CHANGE PROCESS

What do you see as the main changes occurring since you've worked at KeyCo?

Company history, changes of ownership, changes of management

Restructuring, plant layout, flexibility, job losses

General atmosphere, relationship between employees and between employees and managers.

What has been the main impact of the most recent changes?

Work effort, visibility of employees and managers, communication process.

Who do you see as the main drivers behind the changes that have occurred?

What do you see as the motivations behind the changes that have occurred since the multinational company took over?

Did management feel it necessary now and then, to involve the workforce in the process of change?

What kind of involvement, two-way?

Processes of involvement

What was your personal input into the change process?

Do you think the changes that have occurred have been successful?

Do you feel there are any downsides to the changes?

YOUR JOB

What do you see as the main job of a manager?

What levels of influence do you have over the people that you are responsible for?

Discipline, grievance procedures, dismissal, grading, work organisation

Are you satisfied with the level of control, responsibility and influence that you have in your job?

THE SHOPFLOOR

Why do you think people on the shopfloor come to work?

Money, sense of pride, skill factor?

How do you see the relationship between managers and the shopfloor?

How frequently do you speak to employees on the shopfloor?

Do you think employees and management share the same goals and objectives?

What is your assessment of the level of trust which exists between managers and the shopfloor?

COMMUNICATION PROCESSES

Do you get enough information about what is going on in the company?

What are the formal methods of communication which exist in the company?

Do you think people at all levels of the company can speak their minds freely?
open or closed organisation?

Which of these statements do you think apply to KeyCo

Response Card 1

We work together as a team
We are all individuals with our own interests
A Them and Us situation, management against employees
A Them and us, union against management
Department against department

THE COMPANY

Is KeyCo a typical lock company?

Do you think a lock-making community exists?

Do any traditions of KeyCo exist?

Do people at KeyCo share a sense of identity with one another?

as individuals, as departments, work groups, company etc.

Is KeyCo part of the local community?

Community involvement, social events, charitable causes etc.

Should the company's involvement be increased or decreased?

What do you see the future of KeyCo as looking like?

THE UNION

Why do trade unions exist?

What is the role of the LockUnion at KeyCo?

has it changed over time?

Was the LockUnion involved in the change process?

methods of involvement?

Do you think the company sees the LockUnion as useful or as an obstacle?

What is your opinion of joint decision-making schemes?

Do you think that people can have loyalty to the company and to the union at the same time?

Appendix 3

Sample of an interview item using more structured questioning

Union Power

First of all I asked some open ended questions, for example

'Would you consider your union to be powerful?', and, 'What do you consider are the characteristics of a powerful union?'

This then led to a general discussion in most cases, as people elaborated on their answers.

The objective then was to expand upon these answers, to allow people to consider elements of union power, or possible roles and functions of their union which they either had not considered or even articulated before.

This was achieved through the presentation of a list of possible characteristics of union power/influence which I had constructed. Some of these characteristics were my own thoughts and some derived from earlier interviews across the period of research from 1983. People were then asked to comment on and discuss whether they felt any of these characteristics did make a union powerful.

'Please could you tell me how important you think the following things are to whether a union is seen as powerful or to making a union powerful.'

- **Size of union. Do you think it matters how large or small the membership is?**

- **Ability to strike**

- **Good relationship with management**

Here again, I wanted to uncover what people meant by a 'good' relationship. So if somebody commented that they thought a good relationship with management did make a union powerful, then I would ask them what they saw as a good relationship. If they were unsure, I would ask:-

- **Is it good to have a close relationship or a more 'at arms length' relationship?**

The list of possible characteristics then continued:-

- **Success in pay settlements**

- **Ability to win common law claims**

- **Ability to resist management**

- **Influence in the TUC**

- **Political influence**

If people were unsure, or unable to give an answer, I would suggest that they tried to place their answer on a 1-4 scale of importance as a point of reference where 1 is 'Very Important' and 4 is 'Not Important'. People could choose not to give an opinion if they wished.

Searching Interview Content by Person or by Subject Category

IntaView - Interview Assistant: Parkes83

File Edit Add Reference New Interview Set

Interview Details

ID Number: 1
File Name: C:\INTAVIEW\PARKE83\in
Employee Name: Alan Lowbridge
Date Recorded: Date
Position: Position

Location for Section 1 of 139

Interview Number: 1
Page Number: 2
Section Number: 1

Interview Name:

Category: legitimacy of the union

R Well I think it's an important job if you've got the right man for the job, you know. John Elks as I see it, we've had shop steward before John but they've never got the excellence of John Elks because he's a fair minded chap you see, he's not bombastic and he's willing to listen to what people have got to say and I think the management are willing to listen to him and he's not one sided, he's not all union, he looks at the other side of what the management have got to say, what they've thinking. When he goes to a meeting he comes back and gives us a good picture you know, not only snippets of what he wants to say which happens with some shop stewards, he gives us a full picture of what's going on and listens and discusses, and he's a good man for the job.

I In general what sort of area do you think the shop steward is important for, is it to represent you or is the control of work, control of wages or what?

R Oh no, I think primarily it's to represent us, that's what the function is first and foremost but at the same time I think he's got to be involved what's happening in the shop, what kind of work is coming in the shop or what kind of work is being sent out, whether the overtime is justified in doing or whether we need it, or we don't need it or whatever. There's various things he gets mixed up in in the shop.

I He is involved in those sort of things is he?

Next/ Previous Section

Status: Ready

Assigning Sections of the Interview to Subject Categories

Assigning Categories to Interviews

Current Category:

Attitude to work

New Category ...

Section Number

Attitude to work

community

reasons for membership

efficacy of the union

defensive on union rights

legitimacy of the union

union power

employee/management relations

Add

Undo Add

Next/ Previous Section

SIDE B I Could you start by giving me your name and age please?

R David Page, 42.

I When did you first join the Company?

R Ten years ago.

I What did you do before you worked here?

R I used to work as a vehicle builder/repairer on a commercial vehicle line. Coach painting sort of thing and vehicle repairs, and I came to Parkes as a sprayer and that job folded up and I was transferred to Portobello from Tame Works into the Stores, there was only one job going, that was Storeman, and I had that job and then I progressed from there to toolsetting when the opportunity arose.

I What sort of spraying was it that you were doing?

R Spraying locks and parts of locks ready for assembly, which is done now more or less on the automatics, so that cut the job out. also there wasn't the amount of work down Tame Works to keep a big stove going, big gas fired stove so that wasn't economical sort of thing so they had it moved up to here.

I What was the reason why you moved from your previous job to here?

Choose a category to add new sections to. Either manually or by browsing through one of the interviews.